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Description and Analysis of Factors That Generate Acceptance of Leadership within Selling Centers

Autor:
Rico Schwarzkopf

Directores:
Prof. Dr. Maria der Pilar Flores Asenjo
Prof. Dr. Lutz Hoffmann

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Prof. Dr. Lutz Hoffmann

Prof. Dr. Maria del Pilar Flores Asenjo

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CI	Confidence Interval
CITC	Corrected Item-to-Total-Correlation
CR	Coder Reliability
ILT	Implicit Leadership Theory
IV	Interviewer
PTL	Process Theory of Leadership
SITL	Social Identity Theory of Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Times of globalization hold unprecedented opportunities for organizations of all sizes and according to Stütz and Hanisch (2008), change the business environment as we knew it previously. While in the past, the physical presence of a supplier in a respective country was often necessary in order to establish and maintain new business relationships, IT-supported technologies offer comprehensive opportunities to identify and approach new target customers. But how important do companies even think their own sales departments still are in times of digitalization, search engine optimization and webstores?

A study about business success published by the tax and management consultancy Baker Tilly[1] (2010), ranked on the Lünendonk-List,[2] interviewed 50 managing directors, board members and sales managers from top companies in the mid-sized consumer goods industry. The result of this study showed that 89 % of all survey participants rated sales as much more important than production, marketing or research and development. Despite the explosiveness of online marketing and search engine optimization today, the words of Witte (1996) still seem to retain their validity, which classifies the sales department as the spearhead of marketing. Even high quality products cannot be sold to their full potential without the successful work of motivated salespeople. Also, companies that prefer to rely on aggressive pricing strategies rather than personal sales will have challenges prevailing over competitors, since according to Plinke (1986), if buying situations are more complex, prices lose their importance to prospective customers.

Nevertheless, the increasing globalisation and digitalization of the past several years has brought fundamental changes that impact salespeople's operational business. According to Bruns (2005), with easier and faster access to information, buyers are more demanding and more willing to abandon a purchase process in the event of a negative purchase experience. Raising requirements for well-trained sales staff is a logical consequence of this. But it is not just the purchase behavior that has changed; it is also about the stakeholders involved within

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[1] Baker Tilly was known as Rölfs Partner prior to March 2007.

[2] The Lünendonk list is a ranking of leading companies in their respective industries.

purchase processes. Biesel (2007) and Zheng et al. (2009, as cited in Sydow and Möllering, p. 114) state that in the future, purchase decisions will be made less by individuals than increasingly by multiperson purchase committees, also known as buying centers.[3] The different roles involved in the buying center create a higher level of sales complexity because, according to Zheng et al. (2009, as cited in Sydow and Möllering, 2009, p. 114), the needs often differ within the buying center. According to Sieck and Goldmann (2007), the responsible salesperson should not be the only point of contact to a buying center, since the business can only be optimally developed over the long term through a broad network of relationships. This is certainly one of the reasons why, according to Kreyer (2011), the increase in buying center constellations ensures that in the future, more and more selling center constellations will emerge on the supplier side.[4] Biesel (2004) interprets the growing presence of selling centers as a transformation of the operational sales departments into strategic customer management departments, which must include large parts of the organization in their sales processes.

However, just finding and involving the required participants in the selling center is far from enough. According to Binckenbanck (2013), especially in the current global market structures in which products are becoming more and more similar, increasing the quality of interaction between selling center and buying center is a significant differentiation approach. Therefore, it must be ensured that selling center participants do their best to inspire the customer and complete the sales process successfully. Managing these relationships in a selling center in the right way is an even more important point of concern than the successful sale itself (Spekman & Johnston, 1986). That is why salespeople need an extension of their former role model as a spearhead for marketing in the direction of a customer. A special aspect that needs to be expanded in this role is, according to Johnston and Marshall (2016) and Biesel (2013), a project management function for interdisciplinary sales projects. In order to successfully manage a selling center, the

[3] According to Wixom (2018), the number of individuals involved in purchase processes rose from 5.4 to 6.8 between 2014 and 2016.

[4] It is worth noting that the number of participants in a selling center correlates positively with a customer's perception of how they assess a supplier's response (Moon & Gupta, 1997).

salesperson must, according to Grote (2012), take leadership responsibility for the participants of the selling center to ensure that they are investing enough time despite their day-to-day business and participate in the sales project in an appropriate manner.[5] However, this first requires one to be accepted in this leadership role. Therefore, this work provides a foundation by examining and defining factors that create an acceptance of leadership within selling centers.

1.1. PROBLEM DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION

Despite the increasing number of selling centers and the increasing complexity of sales processes, there are no indications in the literature about how acceptance of leadership can be generated within selling centers.[6] A possible explanation for this phenomenon is the fact that although the increasing complexity of the sales environment is recognized by companies, their sales departments are systematically overestimated by their responsible managers. According to Schmitz, Ahlers and Belz (2013), a study entitled *Management of the Small Customer Segment 2012*, in which 236 companies participated, found that 74 % of the respondents believe that their own sales department is more professional than the competition. 41 % of these respondents were sales managers and 20 % managing directors. The consequences of not exploring this research gap can have many negative effects for companies, including losing projects to competition, creating frustration and demotivation as a result of perceived powerlessness in the selling center, and internal conflicts.

It is noticeable that in practice, sales associates have little authority over the other participants in the selling center (Lai & Yang, 2017). Can it be a simple and pragmatic solution that makes this research work superfluous if companies simply decide to assign a hierarchically higher leadership position to the respective salesperson for the duration of the selling center? According to Comelli and von

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[5] In the literature, this understanding of leadership responsibility has developed over the past 14 years from the role of a relationship manager which just orchestrates internal and external relationships (Weitz & Bradford, 1999).

[6] Selling centers are a type of team selling (Moon & Gupta, 1997). Team selling literature in general is considered very scarce (Mullins & Pangapoulos, 2018; Jones, Dixon, Chonko & Cannon, 2005).

Rosenstiel (2011), this can clearly be refuted because an acceptance of leadership does not arise from assigning power to a temporary or fixed position. According to Werner and Dellbrügger (2013) and Weibler (2016), acceptance of leadership is even completely independent of position power or hierarchy levels. In order to find out how the acceptance of leadership within a selling center is generated, as well as to allow the applicability of the results, three research questions were set up. The first research question is: which factors lead to an acceptance of leadership within a selling center?

Furthermore, whether distinguishable characteristics of selling center participants prefer different factors in order to accept leadership should also be examined. This leads to the second research question: can the relevance of these factors be linked to the characteristics of the individual participants? The answer to this research question helps one understand whether different groups of people within a selling center require different strategies to generate an acceptance of leadership.

The final aspect dealt with in this paper is the possibility of influencing these factors. This leads to the following research question: can the factors that generate an acceptance of leadership within selling centers be influenced? Answering this research question using concrete examples helps one to understand how companies can actively promote the acceptance of leadership within selling centers.

The research results of this work may be of interest to various interest groups centered around business and science. On the business side, the insights may be of interest to salespeople, sales managers, organizational developers, coaches, and other stakeholders who have professional interfaces with selling centers. On the scientific side, economists or economics psychologists who conduct research in the field of sales psychology or leadership psychology can further process the findings of this work in their own research activities.

1.2. STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

This work can be divided into three parts. Chapter 2 provides a literature review and the theoretical framework by summarizing the current state of research and delimiting it from other areas of research. The theories presented each form individual sub-areas of a higher-level investigation model that is presented at the

end of the chapter. In this model, the emergence of an acceptance of leadership within selling centers is presented in a process-oriented way.

The task of the qualitative study presented in Chapter 3 was to explore concrete factors starting from the higher-level investigation model. For this purpose, an interview guide was created and semi-structured interviews with N = 12 survey participants were conducted. An analysis and discussion of the results served to answer Research Question 1 and Research Question 3. The results also served to derive the hypotheses that formed the basis for the quantitative research.

The task of the quantitative study described in Chapter 4 was to find out whether the factors have different relevance for selling center participants with different characteristics. For this purpose, a questionnaire was created and validated. An analysis of the results from N = 166 survey participants served to test hypotheses and answer Research Question 2 in its discussion section. Figure 1 gives a brief overview of this process. The work ends with a conclusion.

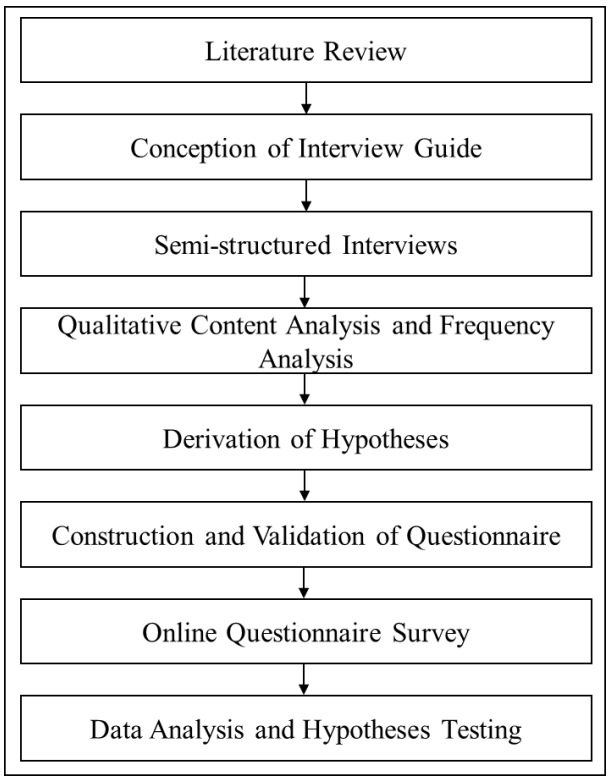

Figure 1. Research model. Source: author's representation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As can be deduced from the title of this research paper as well as the formulation of the research questions, the theoretical framework affects several scientific areas. These include the selling center as a construct, the role allocation within a selling center, as well as selected aspects of leadership and acceptance theories. In the course of this chapter, the links between these scientific areas will be gradually established until they can be fully consolidated as a scientific investigation model.

2.1. DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SELLING CENTERS

This chapter will first define and delimit the term *selling center*. In addition to considering the organizational framework, various role concepts will be presented and evaluated according to defined criteria with regard to the investigation model of this work.

According to Schwaner (1996), the concept of selling centers was established in 1975 by Fitzroy and Mandry. Different synonyms for the term *selling center* can be found in the literature. For example, Günter (1979) has listed the synonyms *sales collegium* and *selling team*. Another synonym as a *sales committee*[7] can be found in Engelhardt and Günther (1981).

The purpose of a selling center, according to Helm and Mauroner (2015), is to successfully complete a sales transaction. According to Scharff (2005), selling centers are analogous to buying centers[8] and consist of all people involved in the acquisition and negotiation process from the supplier side.[9] According to Lippold

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[7] The term *sales committee* is analogous to the term purchase committee, which is used by Reimann (2005) as a synonym for buying center.

[8] According to Kotler, Armstrong, Wong and Saunders, (2011), buying centers cover the entirety of all purchase process tasks, consist of different participants work on different subtasks, and are newly formed for each purchase project.

[9] According to Moon and Gupta (1997, as cited in Gawantka, 2007, p. 31), the strong analogy between buying centers and selling centers even enables the adaptation of research content.

(2016), a characteristic of the acquisition and negotiation process is the intended alignment with the purchase process of the buying center. This purchase process can have different degrees of complexity depending on the expertise and needs of the buying center participants involved. As described in a metaphorically way in Ziouziou (2010), the expertise and processes of selling centers and buying centers should converge during transaction processes like gears. To accomplish this, the roles involved in the purchase process of the buying center should be adapted within the selling center (Kothandaram, Agnihotri & Anderson, 2011).

Since the required participants of a buying center can change during a purchase process, this also affects the team structure of selling centers. Thus, according to Moon and Armstrong (1994, as cited in Borders, 2009, p. 27) and Jelinek and Jelinek (2010), a membership within a selling center tends to be tactical and variable, and role allocations for selling centers depend on the type of transaction processes. The size of a selling center team, according to Lewin (1996, as cited in Hoffmann, 2006, p. 75), usually correlates with the size of a buying center team. According to Sieck and Goldmann (2007), it is also possible, similar to buying centers, that even external people can be part of selling centers. This might be the case if the available internal resources are insufficient to answer legal, technical or tax related questions of buying center participants. If the structures of both a buying center and a selling center are sufficiently similar, according to Jacob (1998), this is referred to as *center matching*.

However, there are certain economic conditions and considerations that influence the emergence of selling centers. These play a role in the classification of selling centers as a form of organization on which the participant segmentation of this paper is based. In the new customer business, selling centers, according to Lippold (2016), are used regardless of the size or importance of a customer. According to Moon and Armstrong (1994, as cited in Borders, 2009, p. 27) and Frenzen (2009), a selling center needs to be re-formed for each acquisition process. This flexibility in customer acquisition is an important feature of selling centers according to Wengler (2005).

In the existing customer business, according to Biesel (2013), selling centers are used more as a taskforce for key accounts.[10] According to Biesel (2007), due to their strategic importance for the supplier, they claim to have short-term answers to questions from their own buying center. Through supplier-based selling centers, key accounts can ensure that information is exchanged easily and directly between their own departments and the supplier's departments. In the study *How Digitization Is Changing B2B Distribution*, Handschuh and Gebhardt (2016) came to the conclusion that 65% of the surveyed sales managers see uncomplicated customer interaction as indispensable for suppliers in the future. However, when it comes to managing existing customers, this is not done by selling centers in the narrower sense, but by service centers or repeat selling centers. These constructs are development stages of selling centers that were classified by Kühne (2018) in a superordinate relationship center concept, as shown in Figure 2.

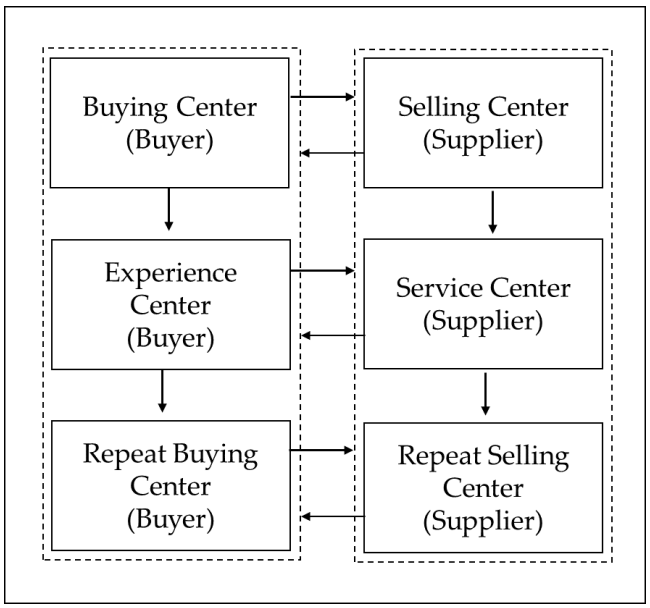

Figure 2. Chronological life cycle of a relationship center. Source: author's representation based on Schütze (1993, as cited in Kühne 2018, p. 22).

[10] According to Loy (2006), key accounts are defined as the strategically most important customers of a company. According to Loy (2006), these customers usually require more complex support than other customers.

A relationship center is a processual model of interdisciplinary business relationships between customers and suppliers. According to Kühne (2018), buying centers develop into experience centers after the completion of a purchase process, while selling centers develop into service centers once their sales process has been completed. During this phase, customers gain experiences with providers that are also characterized by their communication with service centers. In the case of potential follow-up business such as cross- or upselling, experience centers, according to Kühne (2018), develop into repeat buying centers, while service centers develop into repeat selling centers.

Furthermore, the decision to create selling centers is influenced by the complexity or relevance of business opportunities (Pinker & Shumsky, 2000; Moon & Armstrong, 1994). According to Frenzen (2009), Lippold (2016) and Hutt, Johnston and Ronchetto (1985), selling centers are used if transaction volumes exceed certain sizes or if products and services offered have a certain complexity that require explanations.[11] In connection with high transaction costs, the procurement risk also increases, which can lead to more structured and more formal purchase processes to reduce the risk of a mis-purchase. According to Lewin (1996, as cited in Hoffmann, 2006, p. 75) and Menthe and Sieg (2013), Markets in which the perceived purchase risk is high or purchase processes are rather formalized, are also characteristic for the emergence of selling centers.

This leads to the following classification of selling centers for this work: a selling center is a tactical, time-limited organization consisting of an interdisciplinary team where activities are closely aligned with the respective type of purchase process of a buying center. Selling centers have the purpose of successfully completing a sales transaction and must be reshaped for each sales process. The emergence of selling centers is more likely to occur in complex market environments and / or when dealing with high transaction volumes that tend to be associated with high procurement risks.

[11] Whether products require explanation depends, according to Creutzig (2009), in particular, on the respective industry.

2.1.1 Classification as a project

The definition derived from the previous chapter developed the basis for an organizational classification of selling centers as project teams. This classification is possible in accordance with DIN 69 901. It defines a project, according to Zimmermann, Stark and Rieck (2006), based on the uniqueness of its conditions as a whole, such as target, time and personnel limitation, distinctivenss compared with other projects and its project-specific organization. Targets, requirements for specialists and deadlines are also individual for selling centers because they depend on the individual purchase processes of buying centers and therefore differ per sales project. This chapter is dedicated to the kind of project-specific organization that has not yet been discussed, but forms the basis for possible participant segmentation models. According to Hölzle (2007), three different forms of organization can be distinguished in project management, which are referred to as pure project management, influence project management[12] and matrix project management. These differ according to Birker (1995, as cited in Stahl, 2004, p. 65) in the dimensions of their authority and degree of exemption for participants from their organizational line. Which project-specific organization is appropriate also depends on the duration of projects. In the further course of this work, the project duration as well as the associated project organizational form help to differentiate regular from non-regular selling centers.

Projects managed by pure project management are similar to temporary departments. This project-specific organization is used according to Hölzle (2007) when projects last longer than one year.[13] In pure project management, according to Wieczorrek and Mertens (2008), participants are released from their original activities while being assigned to an independent organizational unit that works solely for one project manager. When this happens, the project manager, according to Wieczorrek and Mertens (2008), leads these participants with disciplinary authority. This form of project organization has advantages and disadvantages with regard to selling centers. According to Müller (2000), the positive aspects are

[12] Influence project management also occurs as staff project management in the literature, for example in Müller (2000).

[13] Also in relation to sales projects only, Kleinaltenkamp and Saab (2009) propose terms of at least one year for this project-specific form of organization.

clear and unambiguous responsibilities within the project. However, this requires a high level of resource commitment from experts who are not available to their own departments during this period. According to Lasko (2005), sales projects of more than one year can be possible for certain sectors, which, however, are more often exceptions to the totality. As an example, Meffert, Bumann and Kirchgeorg (2012) cite the sale of a power plant in which all services and counter-performance parameters must be negotiated in a multi-year interaction process. As examples of organizations that decided to implement this kind of long-term selling center for certain customers, Proctor & Gamble or IBM can be mentioned (Weitz & Bradford, 1999).

In the case of influence project management, the project manager, according to Stahl (2004), is equipped with information and consultation rights. Both the participants and the project manager, according to Meier (2004), remain in their current organizational structure during the project. According to Stahl (2004), the responsibility for achieving goals, time resources and costs is borne by the departments involved. In this form of project management, according to Meier (2004), the project manager only has a coordinating function.

In matrix project management, certain aspects of pure project management and the influence project management are combined. The project manager, according to Heintel and Krinz (2015), is equipped with technical leadership and authority to give instructions, while the disciplinary leadership remains in the hierarchical lines of the participants. In the practical implementation of this project-specific form of organization, however, there are considerable problems. According to Hagen (2009), high conflict potential between line managers and project managers can emerge if they need to access the same temporal resources of the specialists involved at the same time. In addition, sales project-related goals may diverge from project managers and line managers, which may lead to conflicts of interest among the selling center participants. Figure 3 illustrates potential conflicts of interest among experts in finance, business consulting and legal consulting that may arise while participating in a selling center. Conflicts of interest within a selling center can take on different forms and even jeopardize the successful completion of a sales project. According to Voigt and Thiel (2003) and Moon and Gupta (1997), the potential for conflict also increases with the number of

participants and, in addition, if they are involved vertically or laterally from a hierarchical perspective.

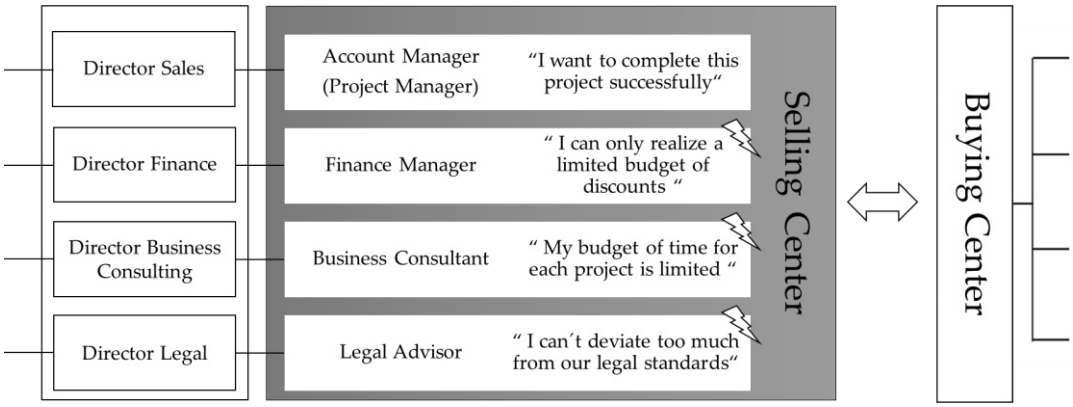

Figure 3. Conflicts of interest within a selling center during a sales project. Source: author's representation.

There are no clear guidelines in the literature about how a selling center has to be organized as a project. While pure project management, as shown, is an exception for selling centers, the choice between influence project management and matrix project management depends on each individual company's specific situation and reasons for making decisions. An essential factor is the existing understanding of multidisciplinary purchase processes of buying centers and the decision as to how to deal with them from the point of view of an overall organization.

2.1.2. Role allocation

In order to gain a better understanding of role allocations within selling centers, literature from the period 1996 to 2016 was reviewed. This review showed that in twenty years, there was no agreement on a single model of how selling center role allocations should look. The proposals either referred to the transfer of buying center roll distributions to selling center roll distributions, or remained unspecific. However, a model for distinguishing between roles within selling centers is a prerequisite for answering the second research question. Table 1 shows the results of the literature review.

Table 1.

Definition of the role allocation within selling centers, from 1996 to 2016 (source: author's representation).

Author	Page	Statement
Lippold, Dirk (2016)	185	There is a unified acquisition process that a selling center follows that corresponds to the buying process. Selling center roles are related to customer buying stages.
Gaggl, Markus (2014)	21	The roles of selling center staff are derived from different functional areas such as R&D, IT, and distribution. They are always similar to buying center roles.
Axel, Bänsch (2013)	108	A selling center should have a similar structure to a buying center in terms of its functional, social, and decision-making competences.
Sieck, Hartmut and Goldmann, Andreas (2007)	25	According to Cohen & Bailey (1997), a selling center is a temporary project team.
	89	A selling center consists of a group of people who are involved in the sales process on the side of the provider. Time and structure in a selling center is undefined. In general, they comprise internal employees, but can also involve external providers.
Wengler, Stefan (2006)	57	According to Hutt et al. (1985), a selling center is an informal, interfunctional decision unit. Its structure differs from organization to organization and per sales situation.

Author	Page	Statement
Neuhaus, Patricia (1996)	151	According to Engelhardt and Günter (1981), selling centers should contain professional experts and also representatives of different hierarchical levels. Functional experts can answer specific questions, while the representatives of higher hierarchical levels have the authority to negotiate the creation of services.
Erichsson, Susann (1994)	50-51	A selling center has a similar structure to a buying center. There are various user groups such like *deciders*, who take the role of formal decision-makers within negotiations. *Deciders* usually come from a higher hierarchical level than other staff.

Note: Since its first mention in 1975 by Fitzroy and Mandry, until 2016, there was no agreement on a universal role allocation model for selling centers.

Based on the purpose of a selling center, that is, according to Loy (2006) and Moon and Gupta (1997), the adaptation of the roles and purchase processes of buying centers, the role allocation of buying centers was also considered. Unfortunately, both Schneider (2002) and Meier and Uhlmann (2017) point out that even in a buying center, the roles and hierarchies of the respective members may vary.

While a definition of concrete roles that, for example, is based on functionalities or job titles within an organization does not seem to be possible, the literature offers further, but more abstract approaches to role allocation. These can be divided into total models and partial models. According to Jaritz (2008), total models take into account all aspects of a sales or purchase process and are therefore abstract and complex. According to Meyer (1999), working with total models has been regarded as illusory since the 1970s, as it is impracticable to identify and

depict all possible contexts. As a result, they are rejected in favor of partial models in different research works.[14] Unlike total models, according to Ciesielski (2008), partial models focus on individual aspects of a process, such as role allocations. Thus, according to Jaritz (2008), partial models, in contrast to total models, are more concrete and empirically proven.

In the literature, both horizontal partial models and vertical partial models can be found. Horizontal partial models, according to Chulpsa (2017), consider both the side of the buying center and the side of the selling center within a transaction process. Vertical partial models, according to Chulpsa (2017), consider either the buying center side or the selling center side within a transaction process. In the explanation of roles within a transaction process, the transaction center approach as well as the selling center concept by Pepels will be discussed in the following subchapter. The vertical partial models include the selling center concept by Moon and Armstrong, as well as the promoter opponent model by Witte. These models will also be presented and discussed within this chapter. The role concept for the investigation model in this work was selected on the basis of empirical evidence and practical applicability. Therefore, each description and discussion of a model is followed by an assessment of these two selection criteria.

2.1.2.1. Transaction center

The transaction center approach is assigned to the horizontal partial models. According to Birker (2008), horizontal partial models consider the reciprocal relationship between buyers and suppliers within a transaction process.[15] According to Scharff (2005), the transaction center forms the transaction process as a theoretical framework in which multi-personal business relationships between buying centers and selling centers take place.[16] According to Schwaner (1996), the extension of the selling center context to a transaction center context creates a new social situation with different behavioral expectations between the participants

[14] Full models within research works are rejected in favor of partial models, for example in Meyer (1999), Schroeder (2008) and Ciesielski (2008).

[15] Also described in Gonschorrek and Hoffmeister (2006).

[16] Also described in Schwaner (1996), as well as Homburg, Rudolph and Werner (1998).

involved. According to Stotko (2005), the transaction center exists only for the duration of the transaction period and ends after a successful completion or the termination of the project.

Within a transaction center, participants either have formal or informal roles. According to Yang, Brashear Alejandro and Boles (2011), formal roles are continuously involved in face-to-face communication between buying centers and selling centers. According to Geile (2010), the formal roles form a subgroup within the transaction center called the *communication center*. Organizationally, informal roles are located in the buying center or selling center, but are not part of the communication center, which means they do not participate in the formal exchange. These participants can, for example, fill internal advisory roles or take part in a selling center or a buying center due to personal interests. Figure 4 shows an example of possible role distribution within transaction centers as well as possible communication channels. According to Bruhn and Stauss (2003), one of the findings from the transaction center approach is that certain internal conflicts of interest can arise through inter-organizational agreements. This may be the case if rebate commitments between seller and purchaser cannot or may not be released by the responsible informal participant of a selling center.

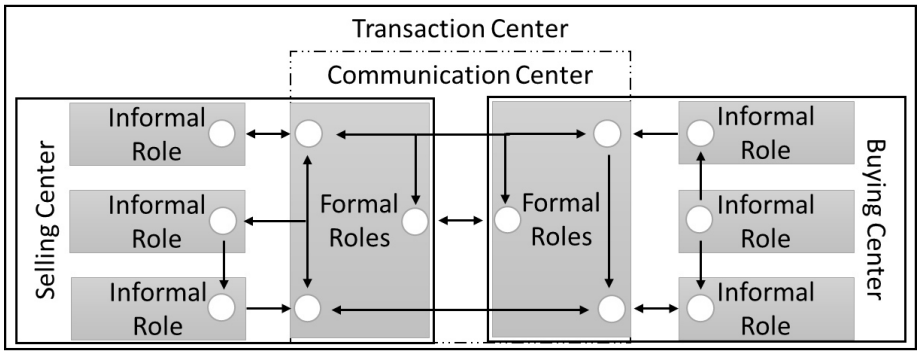

Figure 4: Transaction center roles. Source: author's representation based on Geile (2010).

According to Thürbach (2011) and Pepels (2008), the transaction center approach can be assigned to the interaction approaches that examine the effects of exchange relationships on transaction results. According to Speth (2000), they have the disadvantage in common that at the expense of inter-organizational

relationships, they are less concerned with intra-organizational hierarchical relationships and divisions. Therefore this approach, according to Schwaner (1996), has difficulties in enforcing mono-organizational role concepts. Furthermore, Helfert (1998) criticizes the fact that it has not been verified empirically. Table 2 summarizes these aspects.

Table 2.

Evaluation of the transaction center approach (source: author's representation).

Criteria	Comments
Empirical evidence	Not verified
Practical applicability	Consideration of interactions with buying centers is given, but no consideration of hierarchies and operative functions

2.1.2.2. Selling center concept by Pepels

Pepels (2012) assigns the selling center concept described below to the horizontal partial models. The five roles explained by this concept are analogous to the roles of buying center participants. A preexisting role concept for buying centers was used that goes back to Webster and Wind.[17] According to Pepels (2012), the roles of a selling center are divided into makers, key accounters, influencers, vendors and deciders. The maker within a selling center is the technical equivalent of the user within a buying center.[18] The maker participates in the transaction process as a contact person for technical questions. The key accounter is the equivalent of the buyer. According to Neuhaus (1996), both buyer and user are the most commonly represented roles within buying centers. According to Fritz and

[17] Described in Webster (1972).

[18] According to Pepels (2008), in industrial sectors, the role of a buyer is also called *technician*.

von der Oelsnitz (2006), buyers and key accounters are the project managers of the purchase project and the sales project. The influencer of the selling center is, according to Pepels (2012), usually an application consultant that is the equivalent of the influencer of a buying center. The vendor, who can also be referred to as a seller, is a sales representative equivalent to the gatekeeper. This role often forms the initial contact through sales activities. The decider is a decision maker who can, for example, be a managing director. This role is equivalent to the decider role of a buying center.

However, this role concept has some weaknessees that will be made transparent in the following. According to Fitzgerald (1989), participants of selling centers can combine multiple roles at the same time, which is a negative aspect of this concept with regard to unified role segmentation. In practice, it may happen that a key accounter is also a vendor or decider. This criticism has already been voiced by Schneider (2002) against Webster and Wind's buying center concept, which forms the basis for this selling center concept, and the fact that there was no broad empirical validity provided. Table 3 summarizes these aspects.

Table 3.

Evaluation of the selling center concept by Pepels (source: author's representation).

Criteria	Comments
Empirical evidence	No broad empirical validity of the origin model, which serves as an analogy
Practical applicability	Role concept as an analogy to existing buying center roll concept by Webster and Wind. Participants can have multiple roles at the same time

2.1.2.3. Selling center concept by Moon and Armstrong

The selling center concept by Moon and Armstrong provides a mono-organizational approach and thus can be assigned to the vertical partial models. In this model, there are five roles within a selling center mentioned that, however, do not form analogies to buying center roles. According to Moon and Armstrong (1992, as cited in Skrobanek, 2011, p. 75), a participant of a selling center can either have the role of an initiator, coordinator, knowledge resource, approver or an implementer. The initiator initially identifies the sales opportunity. According to Bidgoli (2010), this role is also responsible for the formation of the selling center. The coordinator ensures cooperation between the selling center participants. The knowledge resource helps participants with its expertise in specific fields. The approver either accepts the work of the participants, or rejects it. This role also provides suggestions for improvement. The implementer is responsible for the delivery and handover of the product.

However, the selling center concept of Moon and Armstrong has already received criticism within the scientific community. Atanosova and Senn (2014) point out limitations due to a lack of empirical evidence and an inadequate reflection on organizational complexity, cultural diversity, and complexity of global selling center projects. Table 4 illustrates these aspects.

Table 4.

Evaluation of the selling center concept by Moon and Armstrong (source: author's representation).

Criteria	Comments
Empirical evidence	No empirical validity
Practical applicability	Criticized due to inadequate reflection of organizational constraints

2.1.2.4. Promoter opponent model

The promoter opponent model belongs to the vertical partial models according to Pepels (2008). This model was not explicitly developed for selling centers, but is used in the literature as a segmentation approach for project teams that also include selling centers.[19] According to Kleikamp (2002), it has high relevance, in particular for purchase projects, for understanding purchase decisions.

In the promoter opponent model, participants can take on either a promoter role or an opponent role during a project. According to Heusler (2004), promoters are characterized by active and sometimes even enthusiastic participation in the project, while according to Heusler (2004), opponents are rather passive or even refuse the project. However, opponents can also have advantages for a project team. According to Weber and Schäfer (2001), opponents force project managers to reflect decisions, reduce uncertainty, and substantiate forecasts with concrete data. According to Domsch (2011), an aggressive form of opponent is referred to as a destructor, who by their behavior actively sabotages the project.

Both roles can either have an expert function or a power function for a project team. As a result, these roles can be differentiated according to Kasper (1990) in technology promoters and power promoters, or technology opponents and power opponents. The role of a power promoter or a power opponent is usually accompanied by a high hierarchical position. Thus, according to Kaune (2004), they have a structural authority within their organization. The role of a technology promoter or technology opponent has no structural authority but expert knowledge, which is important for the project. Participants with this role have, according to Walter (1998), professional authority within their company. According to Pufahl (2012), technology promoters often participate in projects because they are motivated by financial aspects or for career reasons.

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[19] For example, in Schulze (2019), Jakoby (2015) and Engstler (2009). According to Kleikamp (2002), the promoter opponent model also has high relevance in explaining decision-making processes in purchase projects, and thus also applies to a segmentation of buying center teams, which are analogous to selling center teams.

A subdivision into promoters and opponents, however, reaches its limits in its practical application as a segmentation tool for project participants. While according to Breyer-Mayländer (2006), opponents can represent a clear point of view in case of disagreements with the project manager, there are also those who fear negative consequences and therefore do not criticize. Thus, according to Freiling and Reckenfelderbäumer (2010), it is not always possible to clearly identify whether a participant is an opponent or a promoter. In the literature, there is a solution to this problem via an additional subdivision of these roles. Participants who cannot be clearly assigned to a promoter or opponent role are, according to Harsymowicz-Bimbach (2008), potential promoters or hidden opponents. Both potential promoters and hidden opponents show an incongruence between their behavior and attitude. According to Bach (2000, as cited in Plag 2007, p. 34), the manifestations of attitude and behavior are also referred to as attitude acceptance and behavioral acceptance.

Potential promoters behave negatively from a project perspective, but have a positive attitude toward the project. According to Bach (2000, as cited in Plag, 2007, p. 34), behavior in this context means the willingness to carry out an action for the project. According to Meister (2006), negative behavior is, for example, possible in the event of capability barriers due to a lack of knowledge or skills, or unproductive behavior. According to Engstler (2009), potential promoters are typically very productive in the early stages of projects and less productive in later stages. In these later stages, they are often perceived as indifferent according to Heusler (2004).

Hidden opponents behave positively from a project perspective, but have a negative attitude toward the project. According to Heusler (2004), they often perceive situations in projects as pressure. Hidden opponents are more difficult to identify, according to Stahl (2014). Despite the negative attitude, they usually have a high need for security and therefore, out of sheer caution, show a positive attitude toward the project manager. According to Engstler (2008), they tend to stick to established rules and processes, which is particularly noticeable in late project phases. Figure 5 shows these roles as a matrix.

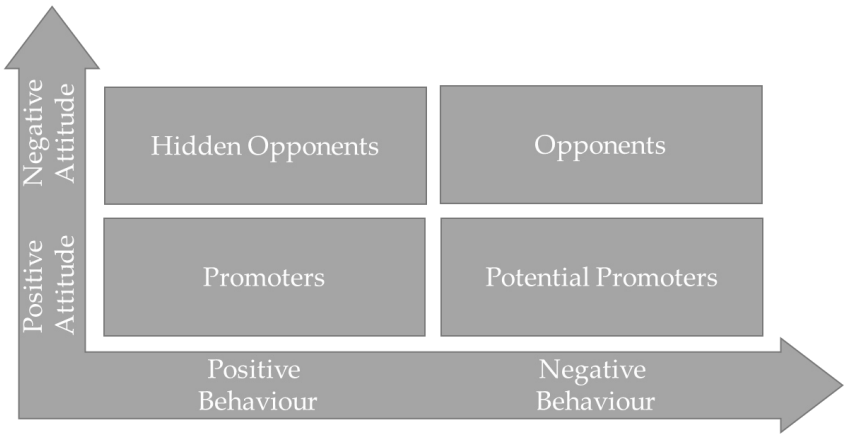

Figure 5. Promoter opponent model including potential promoters and hidden opponents. Author's representation based on Krüger (2000).

Potential promoters or hidden opponents can change in promoters or opponents when their attitude or behavior changes, according to Domsch (2011). In the literature, both roles are sometimes mentioned as only one single role. According to Kranz (2007), Deeken and Specht (2017), Fleck (2003) and Harasymowicz-Bimbach (2008), this role is designated as an undecided participant. Due to its indecision, this participant, according to Deeken (1997), doesn't know yet whether to develop into an opponent or promoter during the further course of the project.

With regard to the selection criteria for the investigation model, the promoter opponent model is positively highlighted in the literature. Schneider (2002) emphasizes the empirical acceptability of the promoter opponent model by Witte (1972) for projects. Furthermore, according to Bidmon (2004), this model follows a clear and consistent structure that makes it applicable for practice. As a result, this model has proven its worth for use in the investigation model. Table 5 illustrates the respective aspects of this model.

Table 5.

Evaluation of the promoter opponent model (source: author's representation).

Criteria	Comments
Empirical evidence	Empirical acceptability positively highlighted in the literature.
Practical applicability	Considers hierarchies and functionalities during a project. Already successfully implemented as a segmentation approach for purchase projects. Follows a clear and consistent structure.

2.2. LEADERSHIP

Leadership encounters people in public or private companies, science, military and other forms of organizations. According to Gölzner (2006), successful leadership helps organizations achieve their goals regardless of whether they are generating profit or protecting a country. According to Kisslinger-Popp (2010) and Habermann (2012), leadership deficits are instead reflected in a lack of employee loyalty, internal resignation, high absenteeism, demotivation and low productivity. The importance of leadership for organizations is reflected in the investment volume in the area of leadership development. According to Lamoureux (2007, as cited in Furtner & Baldegger, 2016, p. 191), between $20 billion and $40 billion are spent on leadership development per year in the United States alone. But what does leadership actually mean?

According to Özbek-Potthoff (2014), scientists have been researching the topic of leadership for centuries. According to Bestmann (2001), Plato and Aristotle had already discussed the concept of leadership. Despite intensive research, according to Werther (2013), it has not yet been possible to provide a unified definition of leadership. According to Stogdill (1974, cited by Werther, 2013, p. 6),

leadership as a research topic is so complex that there are probably as many definitions of leadership as there are attempts to grasp the concept. According to Özbek-Potthof (2014), more than ten thousand books and articles dealing with the subject of leadership in different contexts can be found. Due to this complexity, this work cannot claim to be the first to compile a unified definition of leadership. However, at the end of this chapter, a concept is proposed that is based on scientific findings and can also be integrated into the investigation model used in this work. This concept consists of a process of five steps that are explained below.

Brodbeck (2008, as cited in Werther, 2014, p. 5) describes leadership as influencing others. This can be done in different ways and with a different number of people. For leadership to emerge, according to Fauth (1991), at least two people are required, one of which is the leader. According to Malik (2006), leadership does not require hierarchical differences between them. This can mean, for example, in the case of matrix project management, that the person to be influenced can be at the same hierarchical level or even on a higher hierarchical level than the person doing the influencing.

According to Nerdinger, Blickle and Schaper (2014), influence must be carried out consciously and linked to a specific goal, as well as behavioral expectations. This means that unconsciously provoking actions is not leadership. Therefore, conscious self-awareness as a leader during the respective situation is required. If the employees support the project manager of a selling center but that support was not consciously intended and influenced by the project manager, according to the definition, no leadership was present. This example has already anticipated another characteristic of leadership, which is a reaction from the person or persons being influenced.

According to Weibler (2016), leadership exists only when the influence causes a desired behavior in the person or persons to be influenced. Weibler (2016) points out that this behavior does not have to result directly. Within selling centers that are organized as a matrix in project management, it may happen, for example, that tasks from the direct organizational line of the participants are processed earlier than the tasks of the project manager. Weibler (2012, as cited in Moser, 2017, p. 170) therefore concludes that an intended behavior can already be considered sufficient.

The features of leadership previously presented can also occur in a relationship between friends without creating a leadership situation. In order to be

able to lead, this must therefore be supplemented by another feature. Lord and Maher (1993, as cited in Özbeck-Potthoff, 2014, p. 4) define leadership as the process of perception as a leader through others. At this point, it becomes clear that leadership can only emerge through acceptance by others. According to Becker (2015), however, acceptance that is enforced by the use of hierarchical power is excluded.[20] In summary, this results in the following five-step model shown in Figure 6. These steps are described below from the perspective of a leader:

- Step 1: the leader has to perceive themself in their leadership role
- Step 2: the leader must have a clear goal and behavioral expectations toward the person or people who are to be influenced
- Step 3: there must be an attempt to influence these people
- Step 4: the leader must be perceived by these people as being in a leadership role
- Step 5: the influence exercised must result in the person or people to be influenced adjusting their behavior

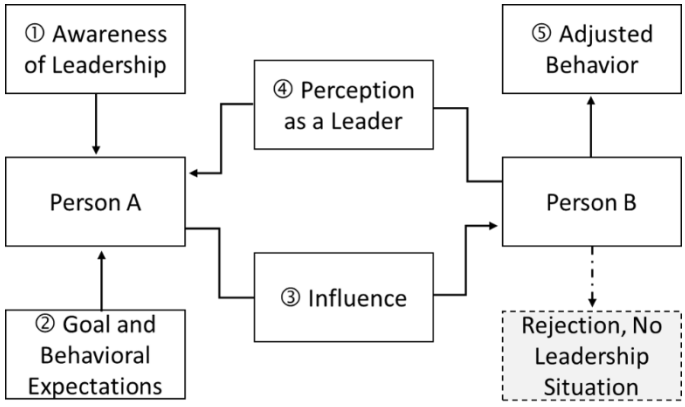

Figure 6. Process of Leadership. Source: author's representation.

[20] The subject of enforced acceptance will be discussed in the chapter Acceptance matrix by Seidel and Bleicher.

2.3. ACCEPTANCE

Compared to leadership, the concept of acceptance attracted the interest of society and science at a rather late stage. According to Lucke (1999), before 1977, there were hardly any references in the literature to the concept of acceptance. However, the relevance of the concept of acceptance within the literature has increased steadily since 1977. According to Lucke (1999), acceptance was listed as an independent concept for the first time in the 18th edition of the Brockhaus encyclopedia.[21] According to Lucke (1995) in 1989, Endruweit and Trommsdorf dedicated the term acceptance to twenty-six lines within the dictionary of sociology. According to Silberer and Wohlfahrt (2001, as cited in Altpeter, 2017, p. 18), the concept of acceptance gained importance in science, especially from the mid-nineties onward.[22] In the late nineties, Kollmann (1998) describes acceptance as a key concept in social and socio-scientific discussions, and describes that it is difficult to argue any topic without mentioning it. Five years later, Betz (2003) noted that the term acceptance is firmly established in common usage and is one of the most commonly used terms. Despite the popularity of the concept of acceptance, there is still no common definition. Thus, according to Schmatz (2009) and Prein (2011), the term acceptance is used heterogeneously in science. Since neither a unified definition nor a sharp line of demarcation exists, the concept of acceptance is criticized by Walters (1984) as an empty formula. According to Bornewasser (2018), the heterogeneous use of the term not only affects the different scientific disciplines, but also their sub-disciplines.[23]

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[21] The 18th edition of Brockhaus Enzyklopedie was published in 1977.

[22] The term acceptance according to Lucke (1995, as cited in Kummer 2010, p. 54) is used in philosophy, psychology, political science, religion, language and law and according to Bornewasser (2018) most commonly in social sciences and business administration.

[23] According to Krebber (2015), the term acceptance in the scientific discipline of business administration is used to measure the economic success of products. Kollmann (1998), on the other hand, uses the term acceptance in connection with the introduction and use of information technology systems. According to Mueller-Boeling and Mueller (1998), there are 20 different definitions of acceptance for the scientific discipline of business administration alone.

This work did not claim to formulate a first-time standard definition of acceptance, but to interpret the concept of acceptance in terms of leadership correctly.

With regard to the understanding of the concept of leadership described in Figure 6, the following two definitions have been found in the literature:

- According to Haller (2009) and Berger, Chalupsky and Hartmann (2008), acceptance of leadership means that the leader is recognized in their role. This corresponds to the fourth step in the leadership process.
- According to Moser (2019), acceptance of leadership means the willingness to adapt behavior to the expectations and goals of the leader. This corresponds to the fifth step in the leadership process.[24]

In conclusion, acceptance of leadership describes that a person to be influenced reacts in a manner compliant with the leadership process described in the chapter *Leadership*. However, this definition does not yet take into account all the determinants that are necessary for the concept of the investigation model.

2.3.1. Determinants of Acceptance

According to Lucke (1999, as cited in Wisser, 2018, p. 48), acceptance is a reciprocal process between a subject, an object and a context. According to Herrmanns (2003), this point of view finds broad acceptance and application across the scientific society.

Lucke (1995) describes these three determinants as follows:

- Acceptance subject refers to a group or person from which acceptance emerges.
- Acceptance context is the situational environment in which an acceptance subject and an acceptance object meet each other. According to

[24] As mentioned in the chapter *Leadership* with reference to Weibler (2012, as cited in Moser, 2017, p. 170), process step 5 can also be carried out by intended behavior.

Schumacher and Hoffmann (2016) and Pietsch (2003), the context serves as an interpersonal mediator between subject and object.[25]

- Acceptance object consists of a certain topic or object to which acceptance is directed. According to Lucke (1995), acceptance objects do not necessarily have to be people.

Transferred to the topic of this work, the selling center can be classified as an acceptance context, participants involved in the selling center as acceptance subjects, and leadership as an acceptance object. This adds the selling center as another variable to the above-described definition of acceptance.

The attitude of an acceptance subject to the acceptance object is influenced by various factors. According to Hermanns (2013) these are, for example, demographic characteristics or the role within the acceptance context. This finding supports the assumption that for different participants of a selling center, factors may be differently relevant for the acceptance of leadership.

The acceptance context according to Pietsch (2003) is, in principle, unlimited. Other departments or the entire organization may also belong to the acceptance context. Figure 7 illustrates this by way of example. Thus, as demonstrated in the chapter *Classification as a project*, conflicts of interest between direct managers of participants and the project manager can arise and affect the probability that acceptance within a selling center will emerge.

[25] According to Lucke (1988, as cited in Heidenreich, Grober & Michalak, 2018, p. 95), by including an acceptance context, this approach considers an interpersonal perspective. This is missing from other approaches that classify acceptance exclusively as characteristics of subjects or objects. Lucke (1999, as cited in Wisser, 2018, p. 95) criticizes those approaches because there are neither people with the basic principle of accepting everything, nor objects which enjoy acceptance from the outset. An empirical review and confirmation that acceptance contexts have an effect on acceptance was made in Lang (2013).

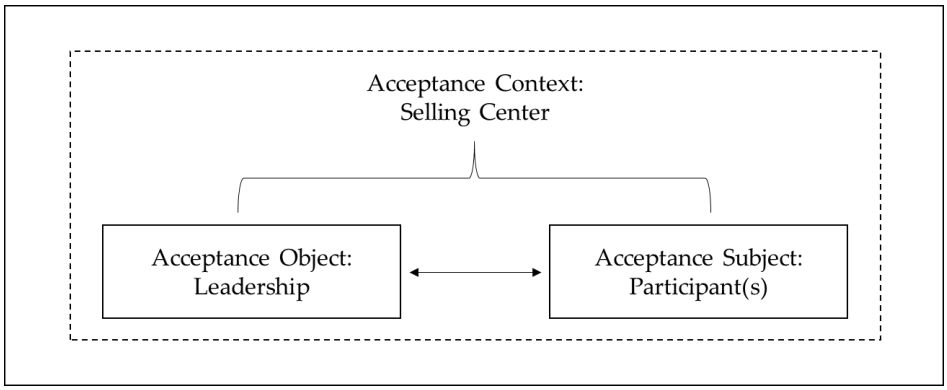

Figure 7. Determinants of acceptance. Source: own representation in an adapted form based on Lucke (1995).

2.3.2. Acceptance Matrix

According to Binsack (2003, as cited in Haber, 2008, p. 52), acceptance can be considered as the opposite of resistance. However, acceptance according to Fraune (2019), does not have a dichotomous character, but can be subdivided into different degrees of expression. Seidel and Bleicher (1989) conceived an acceptance matrix that examines them with reference to leadership relationships. The underlying idea of the acceptance matrix is that leadership consists of an influencing attempt that is accepted by a person to be influenced.[26]

According to Seidel and Bleicher (1989), the degrees of expression are determined by two factors within the acceptance matrix:

- The attitude of the person to be influenced to the attempt to influence.
- The claim of authority by the influencer. According to Schulenburg (2016), authority is the manifested form of acceptance of leadership and described by Züger (2007) as legitimized power.

According to Emmerich (2001), whether an attitude to an influence attempt is positive or negative results from social negotiation processes. The models presented in the chapters of the same name *implicit leadership theory*, *process theory of leadership* and *social identity theory of leadership* will discuss these social negotiation

[26] This idea of the concept of leadership corresponds with the comprehension of leadership described in the chapters *Leadership* and *Acceptance*.

processes in more detail. Conducive for acceptance is, according to Spisak and Della Picca (2017), a positive attitude toward the attempt to influence. In the acceptance matrix, the options positive, neutral or negative influence the existing relevant attitude.

According to Ulrich and Fluri (1995, as cited in Claas, 2006, p. 225), the respective leadership style expresses whether authority is claimed. The leadership style also shows which type[27] of authority is claimed.[28] An exception is the Gessler phenomenon, which, according to Aretz (2007) does not represent a leadership style, but rather describes a disproportionate claim of authority. In the acceptance matrix, there is either the option to claim authority, or not to claim authority.

Table 6 presents the acceptance matrix and describes results emerging from different constellations of both factors. These will be explained in more detail below.

[27] According to Happel (2017), there are three forms of authority: structural authority, natural authority, and professional authority. According to Happel (2017), hierarchical authority arises from the hierarchical relationships within an organization. According to Posé (2016), this is particularly found in the military. Natural authority arises, according to Hensel (2007) and Kriele (1994), through perceived knowledge, abilities, willpower, and strength of character. Professional authority is created according to Franken (2010) and Kuehl (2015) through technical skills and technical qualifications or perceived expertise.

[28] The bureaucratic leadership style claims hierarchical authority according to Bramsemann (1980). According to Claas (2006), the participative leadership style also claims natural authority and professional authority. According to Budäus (1975) and Zingel (2015), no authority is claimed by a cooperative or transformational leadership style.

Table 6

Acceptance matrix (source: Seidel and Bleicher (1989)).

	Positive influence relevant attitude of the influenced	Neutral influence relevant attitude of the influenced	Negative influence relevant attitude of the influenced
Influencer claims authority	Voluntary acceptance: manifest authority	Tolerant acceptance	Forced acceptance

Depending on the claim for authority, a manifest authority or a latent authority emerges when the influence-relevant attitude is positive. Voluntary acceptance and manifest authority, according to Seidel and Bleicher (1989), by definition describe authority. There is a perceptible acceptance of leadership. In the case of latent authority, the influencer does not claim authority, but leadership is nevertheless perceptibly accepted by the person to be influenced.

Depending on the claim for authority, a tolerant acceptance or an authorityless relationship emerges when the influence-relevant attitude is neutral. According to Wiendeck (1992, as cited in Schuster, 2012, p. 12), tolerance or tolerating acceptance lacks a perceptible component from the person being influenced. According to Lucke (1995), such a component can be a verbal confirmation. An authorityless relationship, according to Seidel and Bleicher (1989), lacks formal authority. This is usually the case when co-workers of the same hierarchy work together.

Depending on the claim for authority, a forced acceptance or resistance emerges when the influence-relevant attitude is negative. According to Schmidt (2000), forced acceptance manifests itself through hardening in the relationship between the influencer and the person to be influenced, as well as negative boundaries. In practice, according to Seidel and Bleicher (1989), this manifests itself when resistance from employees is overcome through influence and power

potential. Resistance, according to Binsack (2003, as cited in Haber, 2008, p. 52), is the opposite of acceptance.[29]

2.3.3. Emergence of influence-relevant attitudes

As described in the previous chapter, the leadership style of an influencer expresses their claim of authority. To explain the emergence of an influence-relevant attitude, employee-centered theories were selected as explanatory approaches. These, according to Wald (2010), deal with acceptance of leadership from the perspective of employees. In the literature, the following three theories could be identified:

- process theory of leadership
- social identity theory of leadership
- implicit leadership theory

Each theory address different aspects of the emergence of acceptance of leadership. The process theory of leadership (PTL) takes into account the context of acceptance, the perception of the influencer as a leader, and the influence attempt. The social identity theory of leadership (SITL) and the implicit leadership theory (ILT), however, deal exclusively with the perception of the influencer as a leader. While the social identity theory of leadership describes this perception from the perspective of a group, the implicit leadership theory considers it from the perspective of an individual person. The investigation model of this work was compiled from a combination of these theories in order to take into account all relevant aspects of the emergence of the acceptance of leadership in selling centers. Figure 8 illustrates the process of leadership and assigns these theories to the respective aspects they consider.

[29] As will be shown in the chapter *Acceptance Matrix*, it is not possible to develop acceptance of leadership in this degree of manifestation.

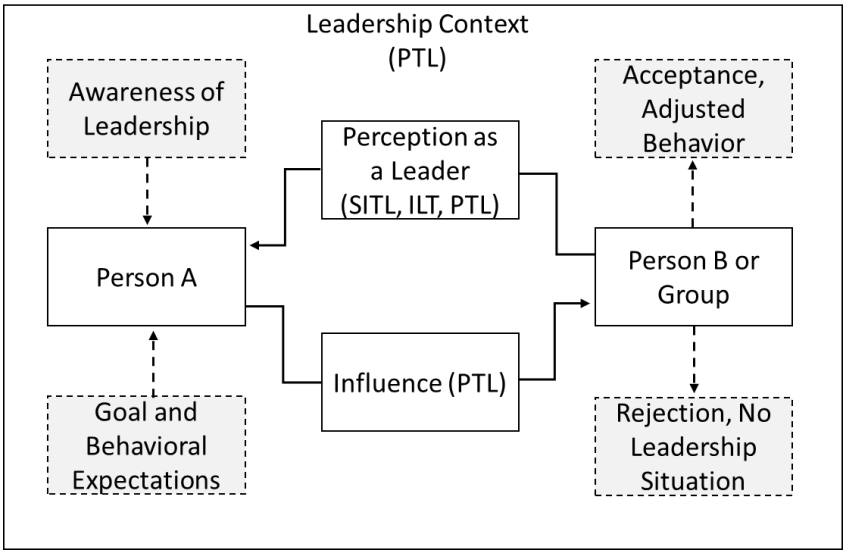

Figure 8. Classification of the process theory of leadership, social identity theory, and implicit leadership theory into the process of leadership. Source: author's representation.

2.3.3.1. Process theory of leadership

Process theories, according to Franken (2010), are based on the idea of rational humans, much like the concept of homo economicus.[30] According to Franken (2007), Pöhls (2011) and Stock-Homburg (2010), the basis of all process theories is the VIE model by Victor H. Vroom. According to Vroom (1964, as cited in Geist, 2005, p. 27), this model is used to explain choices for action alternatives. According to Villalobos Baum (2010), the VIE model is based on the findings of modern process theory, the expectation-value theory and the path-to-goal approach. The term VIE is an acronym of valence, instrumentality and expectation:

- Valence is, according to Vroom (1964, as cited in Franken, 2010, p. 97-99), the subjectively perceived benefit or value of a result.[31] Based on this, an individual decides whether it is worth striving for.

[30] According to Fobel and Bekoevá (2002), the term homo oeconomicus describes a person in an economic context whose actions are based on reason and rationality.

[31] According to Georgopoulos, Mahoney and Jones (1957, cited Stock-Homburg, 2010, p. 519) and House (1971, as cited in Stock-Homburg 2010, p. 519), these benefits can also be an inner satisfaction emerging from the result.

- Instrumentality is, according to Vroom (1964, as cited in Franken, 2010, pp. 97-99), an estimate of the effort required to achieve a specific goal.
- Expectation, according to Vroom (1964, as cited in Franken, 2010, pp. 97-99), is the assumed probability that the goal can be achieved with the assumed effort.

In summary, on the basis of a cost benefit analysis, taking into account the probability of success, a person checks to ascertain whether an action is worthwhile. According to Kolb (2008), the process theory of leadership[32] applies the VIE model to leadership situations and the associated decision on whether to accept an attempt to influence.

According to Mayrhofer, Furtmüller and Kasper (2015), it is characteristic for the process theory of leadership that employees experience and assess leadership situations on the basis of different variables. According to Kasper (2015), however, these variables are not evaluated simultaneously, but as a process in succession. This process consists of three variables whose evaluation each represents one process step. First, according to Paschen and Dihsmaier (2014), the employee seeks and evaluates the situational context of the leadership situation. The research question of this work defines the participation in a selling center as a situational context. In the next step, according to Paschen and Dihsmaier (2014), as well as Mayrhofer, Furtmüller and Kasper (2015), the employee decides whether to accept the influencer as a leader. In this phase, factors like the behavior and characteristics of the influencer are considered by the person to be influencing. The final step, according to Paschen and Dihsmaier (2014), consists of evaluating the influence attempt and deciding whether to accept it. This evaluation and decision process can be integrated into the leadership process presented in the chapter *leadership*. Figure 9 presents the process steps from the process theory of leadership within the leadership process.

[32] According to Kolb (2008), the process theory of leadership is also called expectation theory, since based on the VIE model, an evaluation considers expectations of an employee and efforts that are required when accepting the influence attempt.

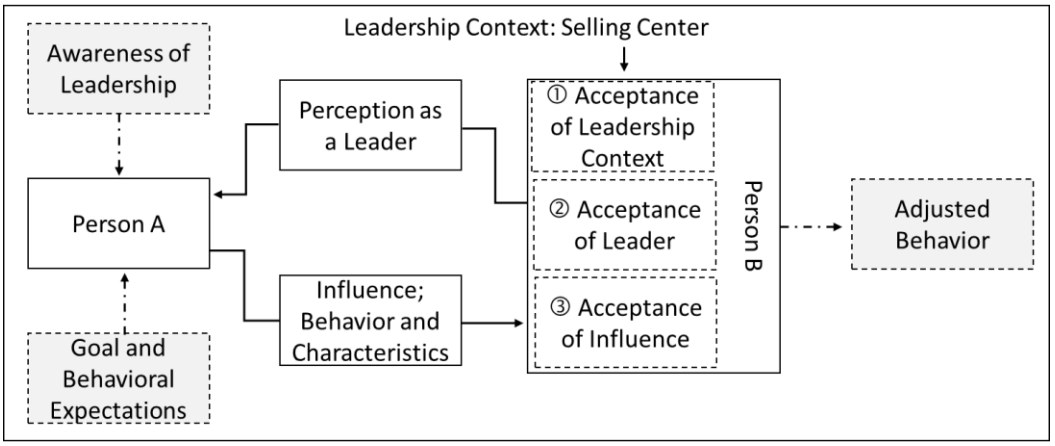

Figure 9. Process theory of leadership. Source: author's representation.

A feature of the process theory of leadership, which distinguishes it from the implicit leadership theory and the social identity theory of leadership, is the consideration of the situational context and the influence attempt. This creates a broader theoretical framework in terms of different variables to be considered for exploring the acceptance of leadership in selling centers.

However, process theories, according to Drumm (1989) and Kolb (2008), are hardly accepted in practice despite their explanatory power. In addition, they are criticized by different authors due to their limitations. According to Meier (2003), the central limitation of the process theory of leadership is the assumption that individuals must always have a goal to accept leadership, which presupposes a need or an internal disposition by the person to be influenced. Aretz (2007) also criticizes the fact that the behavior of the person to be influenced is derived on too rational a basis, whereby many complex influences are not sufficiently taken into account.[33] A less rational approach is used in both the social identity theory of leadership and the implicit leadership theory.

[33] This criticism is reminiscent of discussions on the applicability of the model of homo oeconomicus. According to Suchanek and Kerscher (2006), the model of homo oeconomicus is also criticized for the assumption of perfect rationality, which is why it is referred to more as an ideological model than as a scientific model.

2.3.3.2. Social identity theory of leadership

The social identity theory of leadership has undergone a two-stage process of development. Its origins can be found in the minimal group paradigm, which was explored from 1970-1971 by Henry Tajfel. According to Weber (2018), the minimal group paradigm states that groups[34] of people develop their own social identities, values, norms and goals. The insight into this common group identity is, according to Giessner and Jacobs (2015), the foundation of social identity theory. According to Bettenhausen (1991, as cited in Rohn, 2006, p. 74), social identity theory is considered one of the most prominent and applied theories explaining group formation and the self-definition of group members. According to Lührmann (2006), it also formed the basis for the social identity theory of leadership.

The social identity theory of leadership explains the acceptance of leadership from a group perspective. To do this, it first goes into the reasons why people join groups. According to Weibler (2016), people like to belong to groups if they support a positive self-image and avoid or leave groups that have a negative impact on their self-image. For this purpose, according to Frey and Bierhoff (2011), an evaluation of the values, behavior and goals of the respective group takes place. This evaluation process shows parallels to the process theory of leadership in which the leadership context is also evaluated by the person to be influenced.

The more a participant identifies with a group, the more it accepts, according to Frey and Bierhoff (2011), a leader who embodies the social identity of the group in terms of behavior and characteristics like values or goals. According to Bierhoff (2006), this phenomenon results from cognitive distortions that take place within a group that define a common ideal of a leader. According to Lührmann (2006), the exact embodiment of this group ideal is referred to as group prototype.[35] Another characteristic of this group prototype, according to Giessner and Jacobs (2015), is that it polarizes other groups. According to Löwenfeld, Herrmann, Rösger and Heitmann (2015), this idea goes back to the principle of meta-contrast. This

[34] According to Tajfel (1981, as cited in Kampmeier, 2001, p. 17), a group emerges when at least two people from the same social category are compatible and have a common social identification.

[35] According to Özbek-Potthoff (2013), the term *prototype* is a mental construct that defines characteristics of an object or person in relation to a particular role.

principle states that members of a group try to minimize differences within their own group (intra-category) while maximizing differences with other groups (inter-category). This makes it easier for individuals to be categorized and classified within an environment. In summary, this results in the following process sequence: the influencer sends signals in the form of characteristics that are evaluated by the person to be influenced with regard to the group prototype, and in the event of a match, the influencer is perceived as the leader and an acceptance of leadership arises. Figure 10 illustrates this process within the process of leadership.

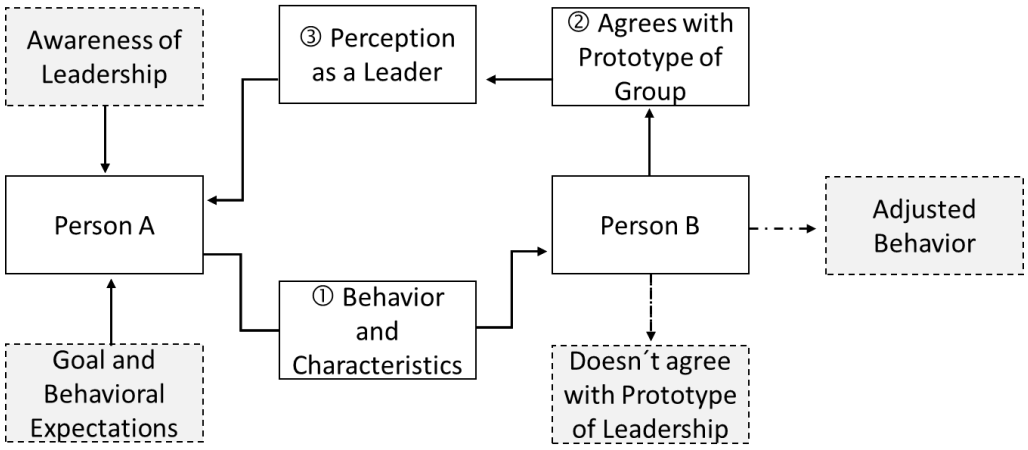

Figure 10. Social identity theory of leadership. Source: author's representation.

However, the social identity theory of leadership also has limitations when applying it to explain the acceptance of leadership within selling centers. According to Frey and Bierhoff (2011), it has been empirically proven that the social identity theory of leadership applies only to groups with high salience.[36] Thus, for low-salience groups, the use of alternative models is proposed to explain the emergence of the acceptance of leadership. According to Friedrich (2010), common norms and values emerge only during the growth process of a group. According to Wegge (2004), this presupposes that the group exists over a longer period of time

[36] According to Appelt (2016), the term salience means that something is conspicuous. Salience in terms of groups means, according to Schmermund (2004), that they have a high degree of recognizability due to characteristic features.

so that common memory structures can form within them. The availability of this period of time usually lacks temporary project groups like selling centers.

Another limitation for applying the process theory of leadership to selling centers arises from the requirement that participants must identify themselves with the group. Apart from pure project management, project participants belong not only to a project group, but also to their own department as a group. If there is simultaneous membership in two different groups, according to Jentschke (2016), it is more likely that participants will only identify with the group they feel more connected to. Thus, according to Mayrhofer, Furtmüller and Kasper (2015) and Homburg and Krohmer (2003, as cited in Schmitz, 2006, p. 192), participants in project groups are less likely to develop a sense of belonging with the project group because of their high degree of identification with their own department. A special case in which the identification with the project group is more likely is the project-specific organizational form *pure project management*. As described in the chapter *Classification as a project*, participants will be detached from their organizational line and work exclusively for the project team. Thus, no simultaneous participation in two groups takes place and identification with the project team is more likely.

2.3.3.3. Implicit leadership theory

The implicit leadership theory goes back to the research efforts of Eden and Leviathan (1975). According to Weber and Büttgen (2018), it is one of the newer approaches of leadership research, and according to Stock-Homburg and Özbek-Potthoff (2011), it has been examined in various scientific papers that confirm its validity. Similar to the social identity theory of leadership, the implicit leadership theory also deals with ideas about a prototypical ideal. According to Jana-Tröller (2014), employees compare an influencer with their idea of an ideal leader and then evaluate how much this prototype is personified by it. According to Keller (2003, as cited in Özbek-Potthoff 2013, p. 71), such a prototype can be shaped, for example, by childhood experience.

The emergence of an influence-relevant attitude described by the implicit leadership theory follows a similar process as described by the social identity theory of leadership. According to Seele (2016), an influencer sends certain stimuli that are compared in a cognitive process by the person to be influenced with the characteristics of a prototypical leader. According to Lord and Maher (1990, as cited

in Aretz, 2007, p. 79), this is done by classifying various sub-aspects during an interaction. According to Quaquebeke and Graf (2015), these aspects may include qualifications and legitimacy within the organization. According to Lang and Rybnikova (2014), these may also include comparing whether the behavior of the influencer is in line with expectations regarding the behavior of the prototype. Lang and Rybnikova (2014) refer to this as a social exchange process. According to Lord and Maher (1991, as cited in Möslein, 2005, p. 83), the more an influencer corresponds to the prototype of a leader, the more likely they will be perceived and accepted as a leader by the person to be influenced. It should be noted that certain characteristics such as age or gender can have an impact on how we imagine the same person to act as a prototypical leader. According to Steffens and Ebert (2016), aggressive and vocal behavior, for example, is interpreted as more positive by male leaders and more negative by female leaders. Thus, according to Özbek-Potthoff (2013), different ideas of ideal leaders can exist at the same time. Figure 11 presents the underlying logic of the implicit leadership theory as an integrated sub-process in the process of leadership.

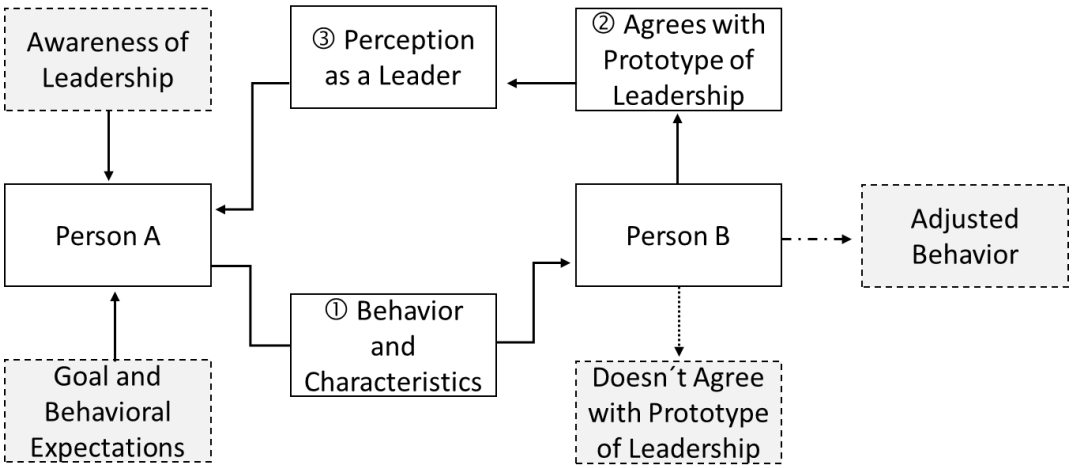

Figure 11. Implicit leadership theory. Source: own representation.

According to Brodbeck, Kirchler and Woschee (2016), as in the case of the process theory of leadership or the social identity theory of leadership, the implicit leadership theory assumes that the respective leadership context affects the idea of

a prototypical leader. Thus, according to Tavares, Sobral, Goldszmidt and Araùjo (2018), factors such as certain personality traits may be more or less important depending on the leadership context. For the same person, therefore, characteristics of the prototype of an ideal leader in a motorcycle club may be different than in a selling center. But not only organizational leadership contexts have an impact on ideas about a prototypical leader. In the literature, the religious or cultural context is also considered in relation to the implicit leadership theory.[37] In this work, however, only the organizational context of a selling center environment has been considered.

2.4. ACCEPTANCE OF LEADERSHIP WITHIN SELLING CENTERS

In the past few chapters, the individual components of the investigation model were presented. The following key findings found their way into the investigation model of this work in chronological order:

- Selling centers were classified as projects.
- Role concepts were compared in terms of empirical evidence and practical applicability. The promoter opponent model has been selected to explain role allocations within selling centers.
- The process of leadership was explained.
- The degrees of leadership acceptance arising from different combinations of influence-relevant attitudes and claims for authority were investigated.
- Leadership styles have been used as an explanation for claiming authority by the influencer.
- The emergence of influence-relevant attitudes was explained by the consideration of employee-centered theories.

The task of the investigation model is to explain the process of how the acceptance of leadership in selling centers emerges. As the final component of the investigation model, the next subchapter will explain interrelations between the acceptance of leadership and the promoter opponent model, and uncover another aspect of how leadership styles can affect leadership acceptance.

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[37] For example, in Felfe (2015), Seele (2016) or Stock-Homburg and Oezbeck-Potthoff (2011).

2.4.1. Interrelations with role allocation

This chapter will start by linking roles of the promoter opponent model with the degrees of acceptance presented in the acceptance matrix. This idea is based on the model of Krüger (1998, as cited in Krallmann, Bobrik & Levina, 2013, p. 158), which explains the emergence of promoter and opponent roles on the basis of their acceptance of an acceptance object:

- Promoters are created by the positive acceptance of an acceptance object.
- Opponents are created by the negative acceptance of an acceptance object.
- Undecided participants are created by the tolerated acceptance or forced acceptance of an acceptance object. Undecided participants are referred to in the model as potential opponents, which is a combination of the terms *potential promoters* and *hidden opponents*.

In comparison with the classification of promoters and opponents in Figure 5, it is noticeable that the terms *positive acceptance* and *negative acceptance* were used as synonyms for *positive attitude* and *negative attitude*. New insights from this model emerge through the consideration of tolerated acceptance and forced acceptance that according to Krüger (1998, as cited in Krallmann, Bobrik & Levina, 2013, p. 158) create potential opponent roles. By considering the degrees of acceptance and disregarding the dimension of behavior as presented in Figure 5, it is possible to classify these roles into the acceptance matrix. However, before a classification can take place, some considerations must be made beforehand.

The acceptance matrix considers the influence attempt as an acceptance object. This makes the claim of authority a determinant when different degrees of acceptance are defined. Krüger did not define any acceptance object in his model. Therefore his model lacks this determinant. This affects, in particular, the degree of *authorityless relationship* that is not considered and the degree of *forced acceptance* that is considered separate from the negative attitude. If the findings of Krüger are transferred to the acceptance matrix of Seidel and Bleicher, it results in the following matrix, which is shown in Table 7.

Table 7.

Assignment of promoters, potential opponents and opponents into the acceptance matrix (source: author's representation based on Seidel and Bleicher (1989), p. 93).

	Positive influence relevant attitude of the influenced	Neutral influence relevant attitude of the influenced	Negative influence relevant attitude of the influenced
Influencer claims authority	Promoter	Potential Opponent	Potential Opponent
Influencer does not claim authority	Promoter	Authorityless relationship	Opponent

Note: As demonstrated in the chapter *Promoter Opponent Model*, potential opponents can still become promoters or opponents.[38] If, on the other hand, employees have become opponents, they can only be transformed into promoters through the use of positional power, according to Bach (2000).[39]

As described in the chapter *Acceptance Matrix*, an authorityless relationship refers to collaborations between colleagues or within teams instead of leadership situations.[40] Thus, an acceptance object with regard to which promoters or opponents can be developed is missing.

[38] A supportive reference for the logic demonstrated in Table 7 can be found in Koleksy (2006), according to which tolerated acceptance or forced acceptance can become resistance.

[39] However, this case is not to be considered as leadership in the sense of the definition developed in the chapter *Leadership*.

[40] According to Hasse-Ungeheuer (2016), authority is the manifestation of leadership, which is not present and desired in authorityless relationships.

For the investigation model, two implications can be derived when combining both models. The first implication is that positive influence-relevant attitude generates promoters regardless of a leadership style. The second implication is that neutral or negative influence-relevant attitudes may, depending on the leadership style, generate potential opponents, an authorityless relationship or opponents.

2.4.2. Investigation model

This chapter will consolidate the findings of the concepts and models presented within one single investigation model. This approach is consistent with the recommendation of Kähler (2017) in considering several conceptual levels when developing a leadership model in order to increase its practical relevance. From the perspective of a selling center, participant acceptance of leadership emerges through the following process:

- Step 1: The process starts with self-perception as a leader by the influencer, as well as the setting of goals and behavioral expectations toward the person to be influenced.
- Step 2: The influencer carries out an influence attempt. Furthermore, stimuli are sent by the influencer in the form of behavior and further unspecified characteristics.
- Step 3: The influencer's leadership style expresses whether they claim authority.
- Step 4: The person to be influenced carries out a four-stage evaluation process consisting of: assessment of the selling center as a leadership context, comparison of the influencer with an implicit prototype of an ideal leader, evaluation of the influence attempt, and finally, interpretation of whether the influencer claims authority.
- Step 5: If the influencer is perceived as a leader, acceptance of leadership emerges. As described in the chapter Leadership, there is no need for an immediate behavior adjustment by the person to be influenced.

Figure 12 shows the entire process and also considers role assignments depending on the degree of acceptance by the person to be influenced.

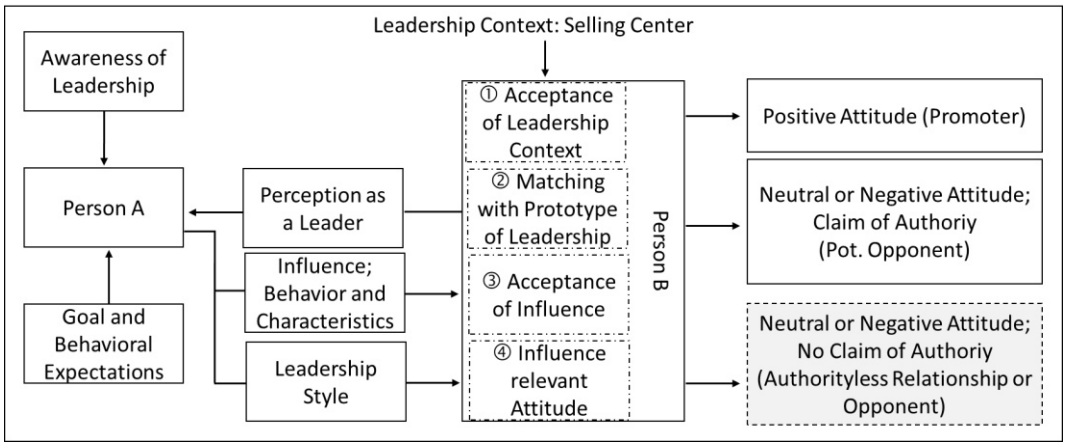

Figure 12. Emergence of acceptance of leadership within selling centers (source: author's representation).

This model is also applicable to other project teams and even departments. However, if a pure project management, a department or another long-term group with a social identity exists, then as demonstrated in the chapter *Social identity theory of leadership*, the process step *matching with prototype of leadership* must be replaced by *matching with group prototype*.

The idea of how to apply this investigation model to the following qualitative survey follows the neo-behavioristic approach of the SOR model.[41] According to Freter (2008) and Urban (2008), the SOR model describes how an individual processes certain stimuli in order to show specific reactions. In Figure 12, stimuli can be considered all of the arrows toward person b, who is the person to be influenced, and the reactions are all of the arrows pointing away from it. The organism, which according to Freter (2008) is also mentioned as a black box, is represented by the four numbered process steps. According to Freter (2008), the purpose of the SOR model is to explain the black box in the respective research context. This purpose is also pursued with this investigation model. Therefore, the four numbered process steps serve as a theoretical framework for the identification of factors that generate acceptance of leadership from the perspective of the person to be influenced.

[41] SOR is an acronym for stimulus, organism and response.

3. QUALITATIVE STUDY

According to Sowa (2014), qualitative research within the scientific community in the 2000s had difficulty finding recognition as a research method.[42] According to Meyer, Miggelbrink and Beurskens (2018), this circumstance increasingly changed due to the growing acceptance in the scientific community and, increasingly, institutionalized use. According to Auer-Srnka and Griessmair (2010), qualitative research methods, especially in business research practice, are usually used for preliminary studies. According to Döring and Bortz (2016), it is always to be used if open research questions are to be examined instead of research hypotheses. It is also the case in this work. According to Schmengler (2007), qualitative research is particularly convincing because it can be used in a very case-specific, profound and open manner. According to Buber and Holzmüller (2009), it remains free of rigid methodologies and allows an expansion of existing knowledge. Thus, according to Faßhauer (2015), it is particularly suitable for deriving hypotheses from research results. According to Huber, Hienerth and Süssenbacher (2009), an additional strength of qualitative research is the identification and analysis of attitudes. This strength is supportive of the research topic of this work, as the investigation model looks at the acceptance of leadership within selling centers from an employee's attitude toward leadership.

3.1. STUDY DESIGN

This work used a cross-sectional study. This means, according to Padberg (2000), that several individuals were surveyed at a specific time. According to Bortz and Döring (2006) and Brüsemeister (2008), this approach is particularly suitable for induction and hypothesis formation. The whole survey was conducted by using interviews. According to Lamnek (2005, as cited in Aghamanoukjan, Buber & Meyer 2009, p. 421), interviews need to be classified on the basis of seven

[42] According to Husmann (2008), qualitative research was mainly criticized for its low number of cases, which do not allow any conclusions about the population. In addition, qualitative research according to Schnell and Kolber (2013) has been criticized for allowing subjectivity, which does not correspond to the scientific approach.

dimensions to allow a clear categorization.[43] These dimensions are: intention of the interviews, degree of standardization, structure of the interviews, form and style of communication, type of questions and communication medium.

The interviews in this study can be classified as analytically identifying. According to Sulzbacher (2003), this means that social facts are collected on the basis of theoretical considerations and concepts are based on research questions.

All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way. According to Wieseke (2004) and Kramer (2011), this means that a portfolio of questions is defined, but there are no restrictions on the responses of the interview participants. According to Mayntz (1978, cited by Weber, 1991, p. 174), another characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that topics that particularly interest interview participants are also preferred in the order of the interview. According to Faller and Lang (2016), this approach combines the advantages of open and standardized interviews, while merely accepting the disadvantage of a complex and time-consuming evaluation. The advantages include:

- The possibility of discussing topics that seem important to the interview participants in greater detail
- All participants are interviewed on the same topics, which enables an evaluation at the group level
- According to Posthuma, Morgeson and Campion (2002, as cited in Strobel, Franke-Bartholdt, Püttner & Kersting, 2018, p. 79), distortions due to observation and assessment errors can be reduced

The participants were interviewed individually and not as a group. Group interviews, according to Fabian (2005), face several disadvantages. These include mutual social influence among the interview participants, fear of consequences for critical statements and a reduced chance for constructive interview situations.

The communication took place verbally and the communication style was neutral. According to Habicht (2009), neutral communication is preferable for a standardization of survey situations and to ensure that all questions in the interview guide can be worked through. A soft communication style in the form of

[43] A differentiation from other forms of interviewing is also recommended by Lasotta (2007)

a non-directive method, however, would leave the choice of topics to the interview participant and a harsh communication style is, according to Habicht (2009), considered unsuitable for scientific surveys.

Both open and closed questions were used. The questions from the interview guide were asked as open questions, and closed questions served as comprehension questions. This approach is also recommended by Balzert, Schäfer, Schröder, Kern, Bendisch and Zeppenfeld (2008).

The decision for the communication medium was for face-to-face interviews. According to Janssen (2011), just 3 % of the content is conveyed by the spoken word, while 97 % of the communication is nonverbal. Thus, in the case of telephone interviews, these non-verbal signals could not be perceived and interpreted by the interviewer. According to Brinkhoff (2008), face-to-face interviews are generally preferable in order to gain a better understanding of what has been said.

3.1.1. Conception of the interview guide

An interview guide was created to structure the interviews. According to Buber and Holzmüller (2009) and Äppli, Gasser, Tettenborn Schärer and Gutzwiller (2016), the task of an interview guide is to introduce interview participants to a defined research topic and its relevant sub-topics. For this purpose, the interview guide according to Apelojg (2010) needs to contain goal-oriented questions that serve as an orientation for the interviewer. The decision in this study was for a semi-structured interview that also influenced the concept of the interview guide. According to Richter (2008), Kramer (2011) and Reinders (2016), semi-structured interviews have the peculiarity that the question sequence is not fixed and that there is sufficient flexibility to deepen relevant conversation passages. This flexibility makes semi-structured interviews according to Skirde (2015) beneficial for the exploration of implicit knowledge. For this purpose, the interview guide contained only key words and short texts that guided the interviewer through the individual subject areas. This approach is in line with Bardy (2015), who recommends in case of a neutral communication style not to use preformulated sentences. In addition to the required flexibility for this survey, this approach had a positive impact on the authenticity of the conversation. All questions were provided with an estimate of the discussion time in the interview

guide. This information served as an orientation for the interviewer, since according to Ertl (2013), the willingness of interview participants to provide information decreases after 30-45 minutes. The interview guide was created in German. The original version of the interview guide and also a translated version in English can be found in Appendix A. The interview guide was structured as recommended by Mieg and Näf (2005) with an introduction, a main part and a conclusion.

In line with Bortz (2002, as cited in Stadlober, 2017, p. 52), the introduction included a greeting, the presentation of the research topic and an indication of anonymity. In a next step, the socio-demographic data of the interview participants was collected. The clarification of the demographic data at the beginning of an interview was based on the recommendation by Döring and Bortz (2016). Also, as recommended by Döring and Bortz (2016), only demographic and occupational data were collected, which could have potential statistical relevance for this survey. The data collected included age, gender, education, role within the organization, industry, hierarchical level, years of relevant work experience, and number of participations in selling centers. Both the introduction and collection of demographic data were each scheduled to take 1 minute.

The main part of the interview guide consisted of questions on the research topic. In order to include all relevant sub-topics, a structuring of the research content by abstraction level took place. According to Ponn (2016), abstraction describes thinking in different stages of concretization. The higher the level of abstraction, the more detailed a model is for a given situation. Degrees of abstraction, according to Gutzwiller (1994), start from abstraction level 0, which represents the situation of the research question. Three abstraction levels could be identified:

- Abstraction level 0 consists of the research question about factors that generate acceptance of leadership within selling centers.
- Abstraction level 1 refers to the theories that, from an employee perspective, explain an acceptance of leadership within selling centers. These are represented by the black box demonstrated in Figure 12.
- Abstraction level 2 describes the underlying factors of these theories.

Abstraction level 0 was only used as a starting point. It was not taken into account further for the concept of the interview guide. Abstraction Level 1 formed the basis for the interview guide. For this abstraction level, questions in the form of short texts were formulated. These were used as narrative impulses to start conversations with refence to the respective research topics. In addition, optional keywords were incorporated into the interview guide, which can be examples of underlying factors in abstraction level 2. These keywords were provided to stimulate the creativity of interview participants and support them as examples. Keywords from abstraction level 2 were used only when needed. Thus, the recommendation of Helfferich (2014) was taken into account in conducting interviews that were as open as possible, but as structured as necessary. Figure 13 illustrates this approach using the example of implicit leadership theory, which is one of the process steps of the black box described in Figure 12.

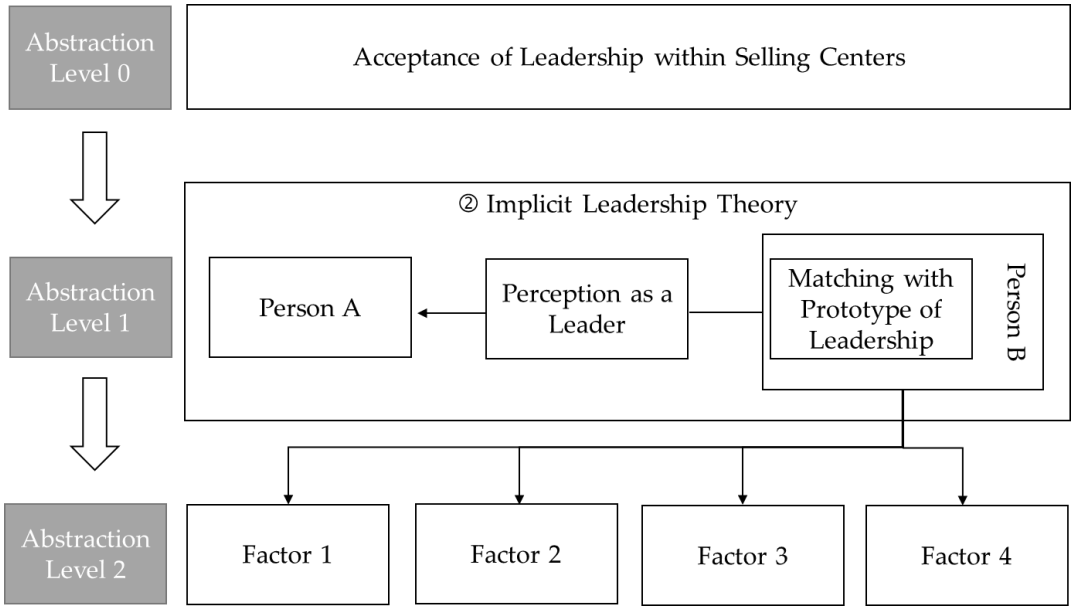

Figure 13. Abstraction levels, exemplified by the implicit leadership theory (source: author's representation).

According to Gläser and Laudel (2014, as cited in Mey and Mruck, 2010, p. 430), between eight to eighteen questions should be asked during an interview. The main part of the interview guide consisted of ten questions. These were subdivided

into three sections with different perspectives on the research topic. According to Heinz (1985, as cited in Matzner, 2004, p. 183), this subdivision into different perspectives creates both redundancies and extensions of content that have a positive effect on the likelihood of deriving valid interpretations.[44] The first section dealt with the introduction to the research topic as well as the retrieval and evaluation of an experienced leadership situation within a selling center. The second section dealt with the description of a hypothetical idea of ideal leadership with regard to the four process steps of the black box mentioned in Figure 12. According to Gläser and Laudel (2006), such hypothetical questions enable narrative suggestions and the exploration of attitudes. The third section dealt with the hypothetical role as a project manager within a selling center and the description of ways to generate acceptance for this leadership role. According to Misoch (2015), this method is referred to as a survey of contextual knowledge, which generates valuable content in terms of attitudes to be collected and evaluated. A comparable interview structure consisting of an experience report, an assessment of this experience and an ideal idea can be found in Krüger-Kim and Wolf (2018), and Mayer-Vorfelder (2012). The main part was scheduled with fifteen- to twenty-one-minute processing time.

The conclusion included a farewell, a thank you for participating as recommended by Döring and Bortz (2016), and another hint of anonymity. This should give interview participants certainty that any critical comments they make will not be associated with their names. The conclusion was scheduled with a processing time of one-minute.

3.1.1.1 Bulk section 1 – Experienced situation

The first section consisted of four subsections. These subsections were used to discuss the following topics:

- Generation of a thematic frame of refence (subsection 1)
- Factors that positively influence the acceptance of the leadership context *selling center* (subsection 2)
- Factors that summarize the implicit ideas of an ideal leader (subsection 3)

[44] According to Strumpen (2018), redundancies can contain reformulations that facilitate interpretation.

- Factors that positively influence the acceptance of an influence attempt (subsection 4)

The first subsection was used to generate a thematic frame of reference. According to Wendt (2009), interview participants often unconsciously omit certain aspects in the reproduction of facts. According to Weiss (1995, as cited in Wendt, 2009, p. 221), a reason for this phenomenon is that contexts cannot be correctly reconstructed in the respective moment. König (2014) recommends supporting the participant in creating a concrete context right from the start of an interview. As a method, Häder (2010) suggests that interview participants should visualize a relevant situation they have already experienced. Thus, initially, the interview participants were asked to remember and describe a typical situation they experienced within a selling center. This technique of narrative impulse at the beginning of the main part of an interview is also recommended by Helfferich (2014). The terms *team size*, *experienced work intensity*, *sales project* and *area of responsibility within the sales project* were allowed to be used in order to give assistance to the interview participants.

In the second subsection, the interview participants were asked to describe the selling center situation experienced as a leadership context in more detail. When describing the leadership context, participants were asked to compare it with the leadership context of their regular work and mention positive and negative aspects by contrasting them. The recommendation to use this technique of comparative questions in order to get more details can be found in Bortz and Döring (2006). If a comparison was not possible, the interviewer was allowed to just ask for positive and negative aspects of the experienced leadership context without comparing it to a regular work experience. Alternatively, it was possible to ask the interview participant for another particularly memorable leadership situation within the selling center and ask if there were positive or negative aspects. Also, it was possible to compare the leadership situation experienced within the selling center to another leadership situation outside the regular work environment and mention positive or negative aspects.

In the third subsection, the interview participants were asked to describe the project manager of the selling center. Based on their own ideas of an ideal leader, they were asked to rate which characteristics were missing or which already existed. In order to support the interview participants, the interviewer was allowed

to directly support the discussion on the behavior or personality traits of the project manager.

In the fourth subsection, the interview participants were asked to describe and evaluate an influencing attempt of this project manager. As learned during the pretest, the term *work instruction* was used instead of *influence attempt*, as participants could better interpret it. In order to support the interview participants, the interviewer was allowed to ask in which cases influence attempts caused conformity or nonconformity, or in which cases influence attempts caused a promoter or opponent attitude.

3.1.1.2 Bulk section 2 – Ideal situation

The second section consisted of four subsections. These subsections were used to discuss the following topics:

- Factors that summarize the implicit ideas of an ideal leader (subsection 1)
- Factors in the form of leadership styles that positively influence an acceptance of leadership within selling centers (subsection 2)
- Factors that positively influence the acceptance of the leadership context *selling center* (subsection 3)
- Factors that positively influence the acceptance of an influence attempt (subsection 4)

The first subsection consisted of two questions. The first question was to imagine and describe an ideal leader. At abstraction level 2, the interviewer was allowed to discuss behavior and personality traits. As described in the chapter *Implicit leadership theory*, certain characteristics such as gender or age can influence the idea of the characteristics of an ideal leader. The interview participants were therefore asked in a second question to consider whether new characteristics would appear or which of the characteristics mentioned would change if the ideal leader described had a different gender, age, experience, or appeared in another selling center context.

In the second sub-section, which of those is considered as an ideal leadership style within a selling center was discussed. Since the exact designation of a leadership style presupposes knowledge of business terminology, the interviewer was allowed to provide support at abstraction level 2. Based on the findings of the

chapter *Acceptance matrix*, the question could be asked whether the project manager of a selling center should claim authority.

In the third subsection, which framework conditions exist in an ideal selling center was discussed. In order to concretize this question, the interviewer was allowed to ask whether there are special aspects within a selling center, whether there is a preferred team size, or whether certain aspects outside the selling center could also play a role.

The fourth subsection referred to the influence attempt exercised by a project manager within a selling center. The term *influence attempt*" was replaced by the term *work instruction*, as in section 1. In the event that an interview participant could not answer this question, the interviewer could ask under what circumstances a work instruction would not be voluntarily accepted. The interviewer also had the opportunity to remind the interview participant of the theoretical frame of reference from section 1 and to ask how a work instruction should be designed to be ideal in this context.

3.1.1.3. Bulk section 3 – Assumption of the project manager perspective

Section 3 consisted of one subsection. This subsection was not limited to exploring a special type of factors. In section 3, the interview participants were asked to take on the perspective of a project manager within a selling center. In a next step, they were asked for suggestions on how to create acceptance of leadership within this selling center. Therefore, interview participants were to explain how they would design the framework conditions of the selling center and how they would behave. If necessary and in order to support the conversation flow, the interviewer was allowed to ask which skills already enable the interview participant to be accepted as a leader or which skills still need to be learned.

3.1.2. Pretests

Compared to questionnaire surveys, pretests of semi-structured interviews relate more to the interviewer as a survey tool than to the interview guide itself. Three focal points were considered: the confident handling of the interview situation by the interviewer, the required timeframe for the interviews and the coverage of all research topics to be examined. According to Schuchter (2012), the

applicability of interview guides already improved when interview pretests were conducted in a more professional, authentic[45] and self-confident way. According to Suermann (2020), the interviewer could also assess during the pretest how long the interview takes, whether the wording used is misleading and which topics were not sufficiently addressed. In order to create a realistic interview situation, the pretests were carried out in the form of standard observation pretests. According to Schäfer (2019), this means that the interview participants only found out at the end of the pretest that it was a test run.

A total of two interviews were conducted as a pretest, which was not part of the evaluated results of this survey. The pretests showed that no structural changes were necessary and only certain terms needed to be adjusted. The interviews lasted between 20 to 23 minutes, and were therefore below the limit of 30 minutes.

3.2. INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Even before the interview participants were recruited for this survey, considerations were made as to how they could be segmented based on the promoter opponent model. Thus, the promoter opponent model had to be operationalized.[46]

According to Witte (1973, as cited in Kleinaltenkamp and Schubert, 1994, p. 162), power promoters and power opponents are only located in the top three hierarchy levels of organizations, while technology promoters and technology opponents are usually located at the third or fourth hierarchy level of a company. This delimitation offers a first approach for an operationalization, but insufficiently considers small companies or those with flat hierarchy levels. According to Folkerts-Mähl (2001), power promoters and power opponents are located in middle or high hierarchy levels, while technology promoters and technology opponents are located in middle or lower hierarchy levels. The interview participants in this

[45] According to Boernert (2006), creating an authentic conversation situation is one of the key success factors for interviews.

[46] The term operationalization used in this work is analogous to the definition by Hussy, Schreier and Echterhoff (2013) to make features applicable and measurable.

survey were also segmented according to this classification. However, it has still two limitations:

- The participants cannot be distinguished as promoters or opponents
- The middle hierarchical level does not allow a clear differentiation

The need to differentiate between promoters and opponents was considered unnecessary for this study, as these roles are manifestations of the degree of leadership acceptance. As a result, this study raises factors that would make the interview participants promoters if they were present anyway. Since both are conceivable in practice in that participants of a medium hierarchy level are valuable for the selling center due to their specialist knowledge and because of their influence within the organization, the limitation of the medium hierarchy level was accepted but taken into account when evaluating the study.

3.2.1. Selection and recruitment

The choice of communication channel for recruitment of interview participants was based on two criteria: a large number of potential interview participants should be available and their professional backgrounds should fit the research topic. A social media platform with professional focus was therefore chosen as the communication channel. According to Hoffmann (2017), the most relevant social media platforms in Germany with a professional focus are www.xing.de and www.linkedin.com. The platform www.xing.de was chosen, as according to Wenz (2015), it is used more frequently in the national context than www.linkedin.com. This was beneficial in coordinating face-to-face meetings. The selection and recruitment of the interview participants was carried out in a five-step process, consisting of:

- Step 1: selection of the company
- Step 2: selection of the participant
- Step 3: initial contact by email
- Step 4: telephone contact
- Step 5: personal meeting

The target company list was made based on industry affiliations. As shown in the chapter *Definition and characteristics of selling centers*, selling centers tend to arise in complex markets. According to Lang (2015), complex industries include services, consumer goods, raw materials and technologies. After creating the target company list, specialist roles and management roles were identified within the selected companies. For example, keywords such as business consulting, legal, pre-sales or project management were entered. The initial contact was made via a Xing message. This message contained a presentation of the research topic, contact details of the interviewer and a request for a non-binding telephone call in order to discuss the process in greater detail. During the recruitment of the interview participants, it could be noticed that the term *selling center* was hardly known and in practice, the term *sales project* is used as a synonym. The calls were made in accordance with the ethical guidelines for psychological research. Based on Aronson, Wilson and Akert (2008), these guidelines state that the research project must be explained accurately, data anonymity must be guaranteed and feedback on the results[47] must be offered. Depending on their preference, the meetings took place at the place of residence or place of work of the interview participants during a common meal that the interviewer covered as compensation for the time spent.

A total of 189 messages were written on www.xing.de, and fifty-one people indicated their willingness to be interviewed. In fact, only forty-five phone calls took place. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to arrange an appointment with the majority of these people, so twelve people were actually met in person for an interview.

3.2.2 Characteristics

In order to ensure that a study could be replicated, Plümper (2012) suggests describing characteristics of participants as accurately as possible. During this study, eight male and four female participants were interviewed. These were between the ages of twenty-four and forty-eight, with an average of thirty-two years. Two participants had a vocational education, and ten participants had at least a bachelor's degree. The job titles of the interview participants and the

[47] According to Mohr (2009), the feedback of results is also a motivator that plays a role in attracting interview participants for surveys.

industries in which their companies operate were heterogeneous. Table 8 shows the characteristics described for each participant.

Table 8.

Demographic data of the interview participants (source: author's representation).

#	Gender	Age	Degree	Job Title	Sector
M1	Male	32	Vocational Education	Sales Engineer	Electrical Engineering
M2	Male	28	Master's	Head of Global Progress & Business Development	Insurance
M3	Male	29	Master's	Global Product Manager and Deputy head of Sales, Engineering & Distribution	Energy & Automation Technology
M4	Male	30	Master's	Global Sales Manager	Human Capital Management
M5	Male	31	Vocational Education	Service Engineer	Mechanical engineering
M6	Male	29	Bachelor's	District Manager	HR Administration and Payroll
M7	Male	50	Diploma	Sales Engineer	Automation
M8	Male	21	Vocational Education	Sales Manager	IT, Software, Consulting, Service
W1	Female	34	Magister	Client Manager	Payment Industry
W2	Female	24	Bachelor's	Junior Project Manager	Medicine Technology

#	Gender	Age	Degree	Job Title	Sector
W3	Female	48	Diploma	Global Senior Business Consultant	Outsourcing, Payroll and labor time management
W4	Female	32	Master's	Sales Manager Large Enterprises	CRM Software

Note: Column # refers to the description of the interview participant. Due to the anonymization of the data, abbreviations were assigned instead of names. The abbreviations provide information about gender and chronological order within this survey. The abbreviation *M* refers to a male interview participant, while *W* refers to a female interview participant. The number behind the letter corresponds to the chronological order of an interview participant during this survey. For example, M3 describes the third male interview participant in the survey.

The interview participants had between one and seventeen years of job-related work experience. The average was seven years. In this study, the term job-related work experience refers to the number of years in which selling center project management or participation was part of their job responsibilities during their career. The number of times interview participants participated in sales projects ranged from 12 to 200. Seven interview participants were on a lower hierarchy level, three interview participants were on a medium hierarchy level and two interview participants were on a high hierarchy level within their current company. Eight interview participants already had work experience as a project manager of at least one selling center, and only four interview participants had so far been involved as selling center participants. Table 9 compares these characteristics of the interview participants.

Table 9.

Selling center-related data of the interview participants (source: author's representation).

#	Hierarchic Level	Job-related Work Experience	Selling Center Experience	Project Manager Role in Selling Centers
M1	Level 2 of 7	2 Years	140-160 Projects	Yes
M2	Level 4 of 5	6 Years	30-50 Projects	Yes
M3	Level 4 -5 of 8	3 Years	50-60 Projects	Yes
M4	Level 2 of 4	12 Years	40-50 Projects	Yes
M5	Level 4 of 4	4 Years	100 Projects	No
M6	Level 5 of 5	3 Years	25-35 Projects	Yes
M7	Level 4 of 4	17 Years	200 Projects	Yes
M8	Level 3 of 3	11 Years	110-120 Projects	No
W1	Level 4 of 7-8	8 Years	20-25 Projects	Yes
W2	Level 4 of 6	1 Year	12 Projects	No
W3	Level 3-4 of 5	3 Years	50-60 Projects	No
W4	Level 4 of 6	11 Years	70-75 Projects	Yes

Note: Some participants were employed in matrix organizations in which they either could not categorize their own hierarchical level exactly, or held several functions that were assigned to different hierarchical levels. For some interview participants, it was not possible to determine the number of participations in selling centers. Ranges were offered in both cases.

3.3. INTERVIEW SITUATIONS

The interviews were conducted between August 18, 2018 and September 16, 2018. All meetings with interview participants followed a similar process. After a welcome, icebreaker questions and small talk ensued,[48] followed by questions about the research topic. Possible concerns about data protection were also discussed proactively. Before the interviews started and the mobile phone recording device activated, a notice was given to each interview participant.[49]

All topics in the interview guide could be discussed during the interview situations. As recommended by Nagy (2002), the interviewer was able to deepen relevant text passages in order to gain additional knowledge. The moderate[50] use of comprehension questions was also permitted in the case of ambiguities. To keep the conversation flowing, non-verbal signals such as a nod were allowed to be used by the interviewer.[51] The interviewer tried to adapt the choice of words used by the interview participants. According to Döring and Bortz (2016), this has an additional positive influence on the authenticity of an interview situation. For example, in some interviews, the term *project manager* was replaced by the term *sales associate*.

During the interviews, there were some peculiarities that probably impacted the course of the conversations:

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[48] According to Helfferich (2004), it is precisely the entry situations within interviews that are critical to the success of interviews. According to Reinders (2016), the interview participant decides in the first few minutes how much detail they will entrust to an interviewer. According to Moehring and Schuertz (2003), icebreaker questions in particular help to create a positive atmosphere for discussion.

[49] Bortz and Doering (2016) recommend explicitly pointing out the start of the recording before an interview begins.

[50] According to Glaeser and Laudel (2009), the excessive use of comprehension questions has a negative impact on the flow of discussions.

[51] This technique is recommended, for example, by Jordan, Külpp and Bruckschen (2012).

- Participant M1 complained of a headache, but still wanted to proceed with the interview.
- Participant M4 was informed about an unexpected appointment that took place after the interview.
- During the interview with participant M6, drinks were brought to the table. This caused an interruption of thirty-five seconds.

The interviews produced 27,395 words. On average, 2,283 words were spoken per interview. The interviews lasted a total of four hours and forty-two minutes. An average interview lasted twenty-two minutes. Table 10 presents the interviews by date, duration, number of words spoken without comments like laughter and peculiarities.

Table 10.

Interview situations (source: author's representation).

#	Date	Duration (Minutes)	Spoken Words	Peculiarities
M1	August 8,2018	22:28	2,683	Complained of a headache
W1	August 21, 2018	22:39	2,541	
W2	August 22, 2018	15:43	1,807	
M2	August 28, 2018	16:23	1,720	
M3	August 29, 2018	35:22	2,130	
M4	August 30, 2018	12:05	1,051	Was in a hurry because of a follow up-meeting
M5	September 5, 2018	31:22	3,129	
M6	September 11, 2018	34:37	3,841	35-second interruption
M7	September 13, 2018	22:08	2,669	
W3	September 14, 2018	16:33	1,996	
M8	September 14, 2018	19:47	2,172	
W4	September 16, 2018	16:03	1,656	

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

According to Lehrmann (2005), the task of evaluating interviews is to describe text units that adequately reflect the subject of the study. A qualitative content analysis, described in the eponymous book by the German psychologist Philipp Mayring, was used to evaluate the interviews. According to Kühnl (2000), this method is one of the most established evaluation methods within qualitative social research. According to Bortz and Döring (2003), it is a rules-based, intersubjectively traceable method for extensive text material. According to Mayring (2015, as cited in Zalewski, 2017, p. 31), advantages of the qualitative content analysis are the proven suitability for exploratory knowledge acquisition[52] and the orientation toward the thinking, feeling and acting of interview participants. As a rule-based procedure, qualitative content analysis consists of four successive process steps: the transcribed data material is paraphrased, generalized and compressed during two successive reduction steps. Figure 14 gives an overview of this process.

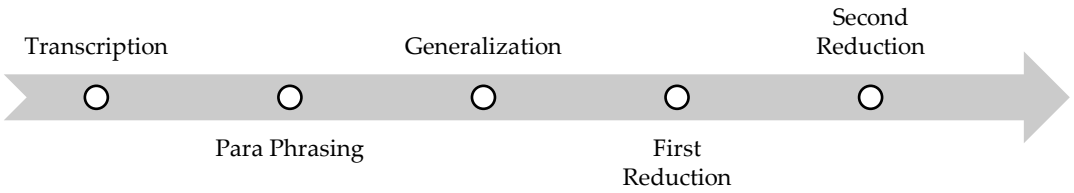

Figure 14. Process steps of qualitative content analysis (source: author's representation).

According to Mayring (2010, as cited in Schütt, 2015, p. 99), before carrying out these process steps, it is necessary to define analysis units for the text material. According to Asprion (2004), analysis units are used to specify the qualitative content analysis and consist of coding unit, context unit and evaluation unit. According to Treffer (2017), the coding unit describes the smallest text component that can be evaluated in relation to a category. The coding unit in this qualitative

[52] According to Binder (2006), the qualitative content analysis does not focus on analysis technology, but rather on the subject matter, which has an advantageous effect on the exploration of text material.

content analysis was allowed to be a single word. According to Treffer (2017), the context unit forms the largest text component that can be evaluated in relation to a category. The context units were all paragraphs of an explicit answer to a question from the interview guide. According to Treffer (2017), the evaluation unit determines which texts are analyzed. These are the respective interview transcripts.

According to Ballstädt, Mandl, Schnotz, and Tergan (1981, cited Mayring, 2015, pp. 45-47), different macro operators need to be used during the process steps.[53] According to Roll (2003), these macro operators play a critical role within the qualitative content analysis. The macro operators to be used, according to Ballstädt, Mandl, Schnotz, and Tergan (1981, cited Mayring, 2015, pp. 45-47) are *omitting words*, *generalization*, *construction*, *integration*, *selection*, and *bundling*. According to Schnyder (2018) and according to Hugl (1995), the two macro operators *omitting words* and *selecting* omit meaningless paraphrases and select meaningful paraphrases. According to Krey (2015), the macro operator *generalization* increases the level of abstraction by removing unimportant and overly detailed paraphrasings. According to Schnyder (2018), the macro operator *construction* creates a new proposition that can express several propositions in a broader sense. According to Schnyder (2018), the macro operator *integration* refers to an existing proposition that can replace other propositions. According to Schnyder (2018), the macro operator *bundling* summarizes similar statements and reproduces them as a whole.

Furthermore, according to Treiblmaier (2006), there are certain rules that are mentioned as Z rules that need to be applied during the entire reduction process. According to Kuckartz (2010), these rules serve to increase the level of abstraction and at the same time to reduce the amount of text material. They form a comprehensive guideline that describes all steps of the qualitative content analysis. The Z rules and macro operators applied are explained below per process step. The entire reduction process was conducted with Microsoft Word. In the following, both the transcription of the interviews recorded and the steps of the qualitative content analysis will be discussed.

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[53] According to Hugl (1995), macro operators are strategies for summarizing text content.

3.4.1. Transcription

According to Pötschke (2010), the first step in any analysis of interviews begins with the transcription of recorded conversations. According to Dresing and Pehl (2012), transcription means processing a video or audio recording into a text. As recommended by Döring and Bortz (2016), all person-related data were anonymized and archived as required by the German data protection law. The transcripts are in Appendix B. In order to simplify the readability, the use of a phonetic transcription was omitted and a literary transcription applied, as recommended by Behrens (2013).[54]

According to Gläser and Laudel (2009), transcripts must fully reproduce what was said and also refer to other relevant content that could be relevant. The following rules were used to transcribe the interviews:

- Rule 1: In line with Dresing and Pehl (2012), each contribution made by the interviewer or an interview participant was presented as a separate paragraph. The interviewer was identified with the abbreviation *IV* and the interview participants with the abbreviations from Table 10.
- Rule 2: In line with Behrens (2013), commas or question marks were used to describe ascending intonation. Points were placed at the end of sentences for logical reasons and readability.
- Rule 3: In line with Langer (2010, as cited in Carl, 2017, p. 225), three points were used when longer sentence breaks occurred. Sentence pauses of over five seconds were marked with the word *clam* in square brackets.
- Rule 4: Comments for laughter or sighing were inserted in square brackets, as suggested by Langer (2010, as cited in Carl, 2017, p. 225). As recommended by Morgan (2016), comments for delay sounds were also inserted in order to indicate when interview participants hesitated before answering questions.
- Rule 5: No linguistic smoothing was applied. Linguistic smoothing means, according to Fuß and Karbach (2014), that dialects and colloquial

[54] As described by Dudenredaktion (2016), phonetic transcription systems symbolically translate speech sounds exactly, while literary transcription systems are based on standard orthography.

expressions, incorrect expressions as well as incorrect sentence structures were retained from the recordings. According to Radke (2016), omitting linguistic smoothing has the advantage of avoiding potentially inaccurate falsification of the raw data.

Figure 15 illustrates the application of rules presented in a text passage by participant W1, translated from German. As can be seen, with the insertion of delay sounds, pauses in conversations and annotions, the dynamic of a conversation gets more transparent.

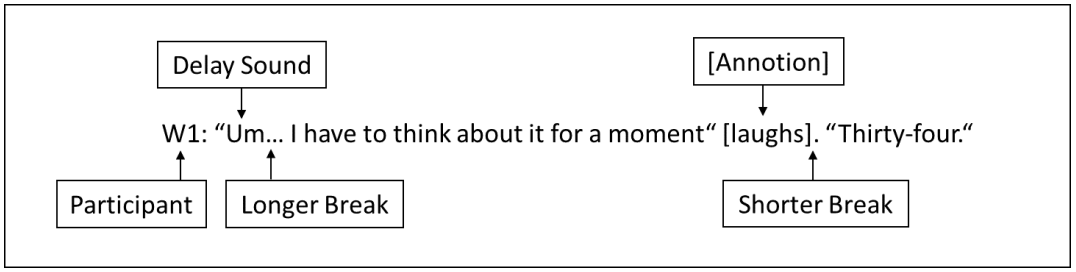

Figure 15. Application of the transcription rules on a conversation passage of interview participant W1 (source: author's representation).

3.4.2. Paraphrasing

According to Döring and Bortz (2016), paraphrasing means identifying passages with relevant content and reformulating them into a short form. According to Schnyder (2018), only the macro operator paraphrasing is used during a paraphrasing process. The following Z rules had been applied during this process step, as recommended by Mayring (2015):

- Z1.1: either none or only very little content-bearing, ornamenting, repeating and clarifying text passages have been deleted
- Z1.2: the remaining content-bearing text passages were translated to an equal language level
- Z1.3: a transformation into a grammatical short form was done

In Appendix C, the results of this paraphrasing process are presented in a comprehensible way. Table 11 illustrates this process exemplified by a passage of the interview with participant M3.

Table 11.

The paraphrasing of a transcript passage from interview participant M3 (source: author's representation).

Original text (Transcript)	Paraphrases
IV: "Okay… the next question is short and to the point… what is the ideal leadership style in a selling center for you?"	IV: What is the ideal leadership style in a selling center for you?
M3: "Oh… this is… very, very difficult to give a short and to the point answer. I think this always depends on the team, the task and uh… Also a bit on the situation… I think such a mix… The… The adjustment of leadership styles is always very good… If I had to commit myself now to a leadership style, it might be charismatic or situational. Definitely but also to stay with the theory… I think directive leadership styles are generally worse than cooperative."	M3: If I had to commit myself to a leadership style, it might be charismatic or situational. I think directive leadership styles are worse than cooperative leadership styles.

Note: Exemplified by a translated passage interview with participant M3. All paraphrases have been given a chronological ID number.

The texts of the interview participants decreased by 46.62% to 79.54%. A total of 68.31% of the entire content was reduced. Table 12 provides an overview of the reductions per transcript. The heterogeneous amount of reduction can be explained by the different narrative styles of interview participants, for example:

- Participant M5 gave deep insights into his professional experience when answering questions. This resulted in a relatively large amount of unusable content.
- Participant M6 used excessive formulations, which also resulted in a large amount of unusable text material.
- Participant M4 gave short and precise answers due to time constraints because of an appointment that followed the interview. The density of relevant information only allowed for a small reduction in text material.

Table 12.

Reduction of transcripts due to paraphrasing (source: author's representation).

Participant	Original Text (Transcript)	Paraphrase	Reduction
M1	2,036	804	60.51%
M2	1,282	603	52.96%
M3	1,577	622	60.56%
M4	783	418	46.62%
M5	2,451	563	77.03%
M6	3,343	684	79.54%
M7	2,210	528	76.11%
M8	1,617	525	67.53%
W1	2,102	530	74.86%
W2	1,301	553	57.49%
W3	1,527	547	64.18%
W4	1,255	434	65.42%
Total	21,490	6,811	68.31%

Note: The introduction, collection of demographic data and the farewell were not taken into account when paraphrasing. This had an additional impact on the amount of reduced content. Comments in square brackets were also ignored.

3.4.3. Generalization

According to Walcher (2007), the process step *generalization* takes place after paraphrasing the transcripts.[55] According to Döring and Bortz (2016), generalization means bringing all paraphrases to a same level of abstraction.[56] According to Schnyder (2018), only the macro operator generalization is used during this process step. According to Miller (2016), during this process step it can be possible to create similar sounding sentences with the same meanings. This is desirable because it lays the foundation for the next process step: reduction. According to Mayring (2015), the following Z2 rules have to be applied during this process step:

- Z2.1: the subjects of the paraphrases need to be generalized at the same abstraction level
- Z2.2: the sentence statements (predicates) were generalized to the same degree
- Z2.3: paraphrases beyond the defined abstraction level need to be removed
- Z2.4: theoretical assumptions may to be used in case of doubt

As recommended by Mayring (2015), only paraphrases that relate to the research topic were generalized. This reduction process is documented in Appendix D. Table 13 illustrates this procedure, and the results are based on paraphrases of participant W2.

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[55] Some authors, for example Winkens (2016), summarize the process steps *paraphrasing* and *generalization* in a single process step. However, according to Kergel (2018), the process step generalization forms new, independent sentences on the basis of paraphrases. Therefore, it was considered necessary to separate these two process steps for this work.

[56] According to Neumeyer (2018), the level of abstraction of generalizations should be higher than the abstraction level of paraphrases.

Table 13

Generalization of paraphrasings from interview participant M3 (source: author's representation).

#	Paraphrases	Generalizations
W2.P2	It is important that the project leader is at eye level and that they do not hierarchically override the other. I think it is important that they are motivated and you can work out the best solution for the client and then complete the project successfully.	The project manager of the selling center should speak with the employees on equal terms. The project manager of the selling center should not be hierarchically superior to the employees. The project manager of the selling center should be motivated. The project manager of the selling center should be able to work out the best solution for the client. The project manager of the selling center should be able to complete the respective project successfully.

Note: Illustrated by examples of paraphrasing interview participant W2. Translated from German. The column # indicates the abbreviation of interview participants and the chronological number of paraphrasings. Also, all generalizations have been assigned to a chronological ID number.[57]

[57] This ID number was used to identify generalizations during the check for semantic validty.

A total of 464 generalizations were created. This sum results from twenty-seven to forty-eight generalizations per paraphrased transcript. Figure 16 shows the generalizations per interview participant.

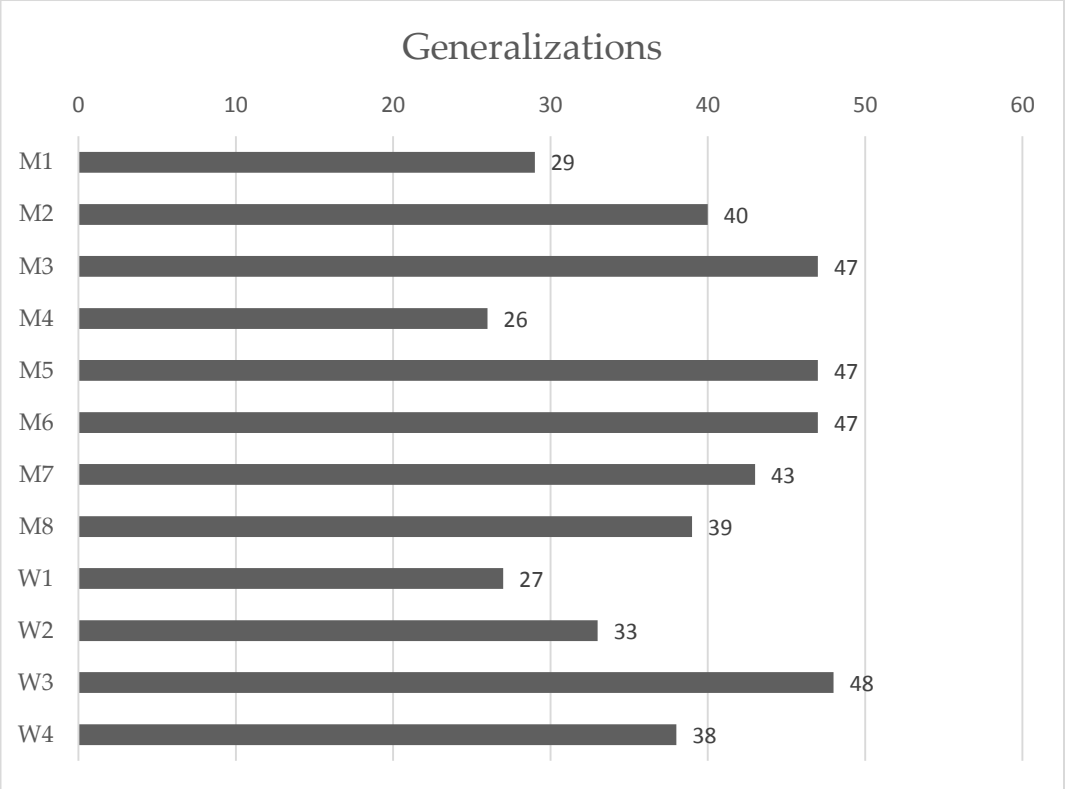

Figure 16. Number of generalizations per interview participant (source: author's representation).

3.4.4. First reduction

According to van Venrooy (2015), paraphrases with the same meaning are deleted during the process step *reduction*. This decreases the overall body of text material, according to Schneuwly (2014), to a manageable level. According to Kergel (2018) and Döring and Bortz (2016), this process step creates a summary of all findings from the survey. According to Hagen (2018), the macro operators omitting words and selection are used during the first reduction.

In line with Mayring (2015), the following Z3 rules were applied during the first reduction:

- Z 3.1: paraphrases with the same meaning need to be deleted
- Z 3.2: paraphrases that do not offer substantial content at the same abstraction level need to be deleted
- Z 3.3: paraphrases that are considered central content-bearing need to be adopted
- Z 3.4: in case of doubt, theoretical assumptions are allowed

This procedure is shown in Table 14 using the generalizations of interview participants M1 and M2 as examples. The documents that were generated during the first reduction can be found in Appendix E. After the first reduction, the 464 generalizations created during the process step *generalization* decreased by 43% to 264 generalizations.

Table 14.

Reduction of generalizations (source: author's representation).

#	Generalizations	Reductions
M1.G18	The project manager of a selling center should have a situational leadership style	The project manager of a selling center should have a situational leadership style
M2.G19	~~The project manager of a selling center should lead with a situational leadership style.~~	

Note: The column # contains the abbreviations of the interview participants as well as the chronological number of their generalization. For example, the abbreviation M1.G18 refers to the 18th generalization of interview participant M1.

3.4.5. Second Reduction

The second reduction is the last process step during the qualitative content analysis. According to Döring and Bortz (2016) and Kergel (2018), during the second reduction summary, statements will be formulated from the central words and terms of a survey. Therefore, according to Hagen (2018) and Kergel (2018), the macro operators bundling, construction and integration are used during this process step. In the second reduction, the following Z4 rules were applied, as recommended by Mayring (2015):

- Z 4.1: paraphrases of the same or similar subject need to be grouped into a single paraphrase by bundling
- Z 4.2: paraphrases with several statements are to be combined into a single paraphrase by construction or integration
- Z 4.3: paraphrases with similar statements or the same statements are to be combined into a single paraphrase by construction or integration
- Z 4.4: theoretical assumptions are allowed in case of doubt

According to van Venrooy (2015), the second reduction results in category structures that summarize the central statements of all interviews. Table 15 shows an example of a category and its sub-categories that had been generated from the reduced text material. From 264 generalizations, a total of ninety-four sub-categories could be deduced. This is a reduction of 64%. These subcategories can be assigned to thirty-seven main categories. Main categories serve to better structure the content of this survey and form the basis for the quantitative part of this study. Together, they form a category system, according to Treffer (2017). The formation of main categories was based on literature. The respective logic for the conception of these main categories will be discussed in more detail in the chapter *Presentation of results*. All documents generated during the second reduction can be found in Appendix F.

Table 15.

Category and subcategory formation during the second reduction (source: author's representation).

First Reduction	Second Reduction
The project manager within a selling center should be able to delegate The project manager within a selling center should be able to plan and control projects:	Management competence: • Ability to delegate • Project planning and control

Note: The column's second reduction marks subcategories with bullet points. They are always summarized under their respective main category.

By creating sub-categories, whether a theoretical saturation could be achieved was made measurable. According to Lüdders (2017) and Küster (2009), theoretical saturation describes a state in which no additional knowledge is acquired through further interviews. According to Busch (2019), a study should be ended at this point.[58] In this study, it was made measurable by examining whether further generalizations can also generate further sub-categories.[59] This was no longer the case after the eleventh interview. The achievement of theoretical saturation is shown in Figure 17.

[58] According to Pfeffer (2008), theoretical saturation is an ideal endpoint for scientific work, but not always achievable due to time, personnel or cost reasons.

[59] According to Struebing (2008), the point at which the content of categories repeats itself is an indicator of theoretical saturation. In this study, the theoretical saturation occurred at the level of sub-categories.

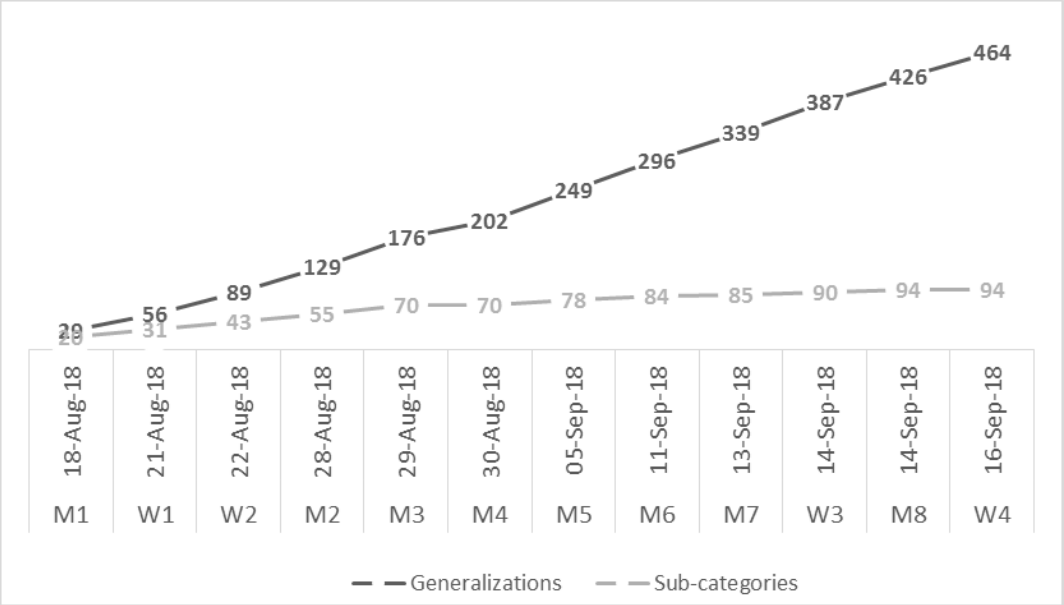

Figure 17. Theoretical saturation (source: author's representation).

3.5. QUALITY CRITERIA

In empirical research, validity, reliability and objectivity are recommended as quality criteria according to Werner (2009). However, Kirk and Miller (1986, as cited in Holzmüller & Schuh, 2005, p. 241) criticize these quality criteria with regard to their applicability to qualitative studies. In practice, according to Döring and Bortz (2016), either the quality criteria mentioned are used or separate criteria catalogs are developed. Philipp Mayring developed his own criteria catalog with his qualitative content analysis. Mayring (2003, as cited in Grimmer & Neukom, 2009, p. 44) suggests assessing scientific quality based on the following six points:

- documentation of the entire process
- rule-based procedure
- argumentative validation of interpretation
- proximity to the research subject
- communicative validation
- triangulation

In this work, these two approaches were not understood as conflicting, but as complementary to each other. Therefore, the quality criteria proposed by Mayring were checked, along with the validity, reliability and objectivity.

3.5.1. Validity, Reliability and Objectivity

Krippendorf (1980, as cited in Mayring, 2015, p. 126) recommends checking the validity of qualitative studies based on semantic validity. According to Krippendorf (1980, as cited in Mayring, 2015, p. 126), semantic validity refers to the appropriateness of category definitions. According to Tropper (2019) and According to Kuckartz (2007, as cited in Schütt, 2015, p. 99), it therefore needs to be checked to see whether the reduced text material could also be assigned to another category. In addition to an argumentative interpretation of categories by literature,[60] all 465 generalizations were re-assigned to the category system in order to recognize potential ambiguities. Table 16 demonstrates this procedure by way of example. No additional categories had to be formed, but names of some categories were replaced with more adequate synonyms. The documentation of this process can be found in Appendix G.

Table 16

Semantic Validity (source: author's representation).

Code	ID-No.	Generalization
1	M3	The project manager of a selling center should be able to motivate.
2	M4	The project manager of a selling center should motivate.
3	M5	The project manager of a selling center should be able to motivate.

Note: Exemplified using the subcategory social competences (translated from German).

[60] According to Tecic, Walgenbach and Neugebauer (2010), the argumentative interpretation of categories by literature has an additional positive effect on the content validity.

In case of qualitative studies, Krippendorf (1980, as cited in Mayring, 2015, p. 126), recommends checking reliability based on intracoder reliability. According to Mayring (2015), intracoder reliability indicates the stability of data. Therefore, according to Mayring and Brunner (2009), text passages need to be processed a second time and compared. The match or deviation of both documents is expressed by an intracoder coefficient (*CR*). According to Maurer and Reinemann (2006), this is calculated by dividing the number of matching codes by all codes.[61] This results in a value between 0 and 1. The closer a value is to 1, the higher the intracoder reliability is. According to Lengauer (2007), values must be at least .75 to indicate stable data. This test should not take place immediately after the qualitative content analysis. According to Döring and Bortz (2016), there should be a time interval of at least one week between the qualitative content analysis and the test for intracoder reliability. In this study, it was randomly[62] checked with the text material of interview participant M7 after a time interval of 17 days.[63] The transcript went through the process steps paraphrasing and generalization.[64] The documentation of this process can be found in Appendix G. A comparison of the re-encoded text material with the original text material showed no deviations and therefore resulted in $CR = 1$.

By using qualitative content analysis, a rule-based evaluation of data has been applied. According to Winkler (2013), a rule-based approach positively impacts the objectivity of qualitative studies. However, according to Misoch (2015), despite rule-based procedures, a certain degree of subjectivity in qualitative research can never be completely avoided. Misoch (2015) therefore suggests using the term *controlled subjectivity* instead of *objectivity*.

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[61] According to Sabo (2017), codes describe reduced text material. In this study, this is referred to as the generalizations created.

[62] According to Brosius, Haas and Koschel (2016), the intracoder reliability is only checked on part of the existing text material.

[63] The qualitative content analysis was conducted on September 13, 2018, and tested on September 30, 2018.

[64] From the first reduction, it is no longer possible to assign the re-encoded text material to the original text material.

3.5.2. Specific quality criteria related to qualitative content analysis

As described above, the first quality criterion is the documentation of the entire process of the qualitative study. According to Grimmer and Neukom (2009), this process documentation consists of a description of theoretical framework, data basis, methodology and results. In this work, the theoretical framework was discussed in the eponymous chapter. The database as well as the methodology were carefully documented in the previous section of this chapter and can also be retrieved in the Appendix. The results of this study will be presented below in detail.

The second quality criterion is the application of a rule-based procedure. According to Grimmer and Neukom (2009), rule-based means a uniform and systematic procedure based on a clearly defined method. This requirement is met by applying the qualitative content analysis. During the documentation of this procedure, every decision required by the researcher has also been explained.[65]

The third quality criterion is the argumentative validation of interpretation. According to Hussy, Schreier and Echterhoff (2013) and Künzli David (2007), the purpose is to present interpretations and results to an appropriate extent. According to Grimmer and Neukom (2009), this means a third person must understand the reasons why the respective main categories and subcategories have been created. To enable this, all of the main categories and subcategories presented below are based on scientific theory stating the sources used.

Quality criterion four is the communicative validation of results. According to Grimmer and Neukom (2009), communicative validation means the discussion of interpretations between interviewer and interview participants. The purpose is to check for communicative validity. According to Ziegaus (2009), communicative validity means that interviewers and interview participants are agreeing on the interpretation of the spoken content. In practice, it can be observed that communicative validation is carried out on a random basis with selected

[65] According to Bruesemeister (2008) and Winkler (2013), traceability of decisions is described as an additional important quality criterion of qualitative research.

participants.[66] The communicative validation in this study was carried out in face-to-face discussions between the interviewer and the interview participants M1 and M4. During this validation process, the transcribed interviews and the generalizations were compared and discussed. Both interview participants confirmed the correctness of the interpretations.

The fifth quality criterion is proximity to the research subject. According to Lamnek (1995, as cited in Grimmer & Neukom, 2009, p. 44), proximity to the research subject in the context of qualitative research means that all interview participants selected are relevant for the study. According to Hagen (2009), the research subject should therefore be linked to the everyday world of the interview participants. All interview participants in this study were carefully selected and also claimed to be working in selling center environments. This quality criterion is therefore considered to be guaranteed.

The last quality criterion is triangulation. According to Gläser and Laudel (2009), the term triangulation describes a combination of different methods in empirical research. According to Gläser and Laudel (2009), the idea is that these methods compensate for each others' weaknesses. Various approaches to triangulation can be found in the literature. According to Flick and Röhnsch (2011), a recognized and central approach is the *within method triangulation*. According to Ingenhoff (2004), this can be conducted by combining narrative prompts with systematic questions during an interview. Thus, according to Liszt (2018), the emerging narrative-episodic and conceptual-semantic knowledge generates different data types that compensate for the potential limitations of each other. The quality criterion *triangulation* was addressed by designing narrative prompts and systemic questions within the interview guide.

3.6. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The reduction process, according to Mayring (2010, as cited in Schütt, 2015, p. 99), is followed by the construction of a content analysis category system. According to Hugl (1995) and Hopf (2016), during the construction process of

[66] For example, in Nienkemper (2015) and Melheritz (1999).

categories, descriptions are revised and refined until they are able to summarize the content sufficiently.[67]

The category system created consists of 94 subcategories, 38 main categories and 12 category clusters. The subcategories contain the codes generated from this survey. The main categories are theoretical constructs that conceptually summarize various subcategories. If subcategories cannot be combined with any other subcategories, these are automatically considered as a main category. The main categories are thematically grouped into category clusters that relate to a common aspect of the leadership situation. For example, the main categories motivated selling center colleagues, and collegiality and affiliation were assigned to the category cluster factors at the team level. All category clusters relate to one of the four process steps within the black box of the investigation model explained by Figure 12. The labels used provide information on whether a category cluster relates to the selling center as leadership context (CN), the project manager (LR), the influence attempt (IN) or the leadership style (LS). The numbers behind these letters provide further information about the respective sequence number of category clusters, main categories and subcategories in order to provide a better overview. Figure 18 illustrates this logic exemplarily based on subcategory CN 531.

Label	CN	5	3	1
Level within Category System	Process Step	Category Cluster	Main Category	Sub Category
Description	Selling Center	Factors at Team Level	Collegiality and Affiliation	Harmony

Figure 18. Logic of the category labels (source: author's representation).

According to Döring and Bortz (2016) and Strübing (2018), the category system and also the assignment of codes need to be precisely described for the reason of intersubjective comprehensibility. In addition to this description, the

[67] Since the categories were formed from the text material itself and not from hypotheses in advance, according to Kuckartz (2012, as cited in Frischemeier, 2017, p. 102), this process was an inductive category formation.

frequency of generated codes is given for each category.[68] According to Schütter (2016), the frequency of codes supports interpretations of how important certain main categories and subcategories are for the entire sample. However, according to Heindl (2015), these frequencies do not provide statistical representativity. The frequency analysis was carried out manually using Microsoft Excel. The document created during the frequency analysis can be found in Appendix H.

3.6.1. Performance incentives

The following sub-categories can be assigned to the main category *performance incentives*. According to Staiger (2004) and Schröder (2003), performance incentives have the purpose of generating motivation. The interview participants mentioned two different types of performance incentives: material incentives and immaterial incentives. According to Zaugg (2009), material incentives like monetary payments address the basic needs of a person, while immaterial incentives, according to Zaugg (2009), address the growth needs of a person. According to Schröder (2003) and Dudersack (2006), the subcategories career development opportunities or recognition can be assigned to immaterial incentives. However, according to Berger (2018), the boundaries between material and immaterial incentives are blurry. The creation of expert status as an immaterial incentive, for example, can also have a positive effect on material aspects like an increase in salary.

Ten participants generated twenty-six codes that can be assigned to the main category *performance incentives* (CN 1). These are 5.60% of all codes generated during this study. In total, 83% of male participants and 75% of female participants mentioned sub-categories that can be assigned to this main category. 75% of all participants from a low hierarchy generated codes for this main category, while 100% of participants from a high hierarchy generated codes for this main category. The interview participants mentioned the development of their technical and interdisciplinary skills within the selling center (CN 111) nine times. Five codes

[68] Since terms were only mentioned in positive ratings, for example, when describing a prototypical leader, a one-dimensional frequency analysis was applied instead of a relational frequency analysis. According to Merten (2013), this means that codes were not categorized as positive, neutral or negative.

related to the desire to participate in a successful project (CN 112). Four codes related to the desire for recognition from their own organization when participating in a selling center (CN 113). Three codes related to that the amount of monetary participation in case a successful sales project closure should be higher than in other projects that run in parallel (CN 114). Three codes were related to receiving positive recognition from the leader of the selling center (CN 115). One code referred to a performance-related commission (CN 116). One code referred to the desire to be praised in front of the respective client the selling center is working with (CN 117). Table 17 shows the results.

Table 17.

Frequency analysis of performance incentives (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 111	9	1.94	6	50.00
CN 112	5	1.08	3	25.00
CN 113	4	0.86	3	25.00
CN 113	3	0.65	2	16.67
CN 132	3	0.65	2	16.67
CN 133	1	0.22	1	8.33
CN 114	1	0.22	1	8.33

3.6.2. Structural framework conditions

According to Zülsdorf (2008), the term *structural framework conditions* (CN 2) describes structures and processes of organizations. The following main categories can be summarized by the category cluster structural framework conditions:

- transparency
- voluntary participation
- existence of a dispute resolution center
- possibility for personal meetings
- protection against disruptive factors
- small team size

The first main category is *transparency*. According to Bogert (2013), transparency within a project means that decisions are comprehensible, problems and mistakes will be communicated, and the strategy as well as the respective project status are announced. According to Bodenmüller (2014), transparency also means that responsibilities within the project team are clear, databases with shared access rights can be used, and relevant information about customers and competition are communicated to the project team. A project kickoff also relates to the subject of project transparency. According to Schmitt and Schinkel (2012), a project kickoff primarily serves the purpose of transparency, as participants involved will be informed about goals and planned procedures.

Transparency (CN 21) is the biggest main category in this survey. Sixty-one codes represent a total of 13.15% of all codes. All interview participants, regardless of their gender or hierarchical position, mentioned at least one of the following sub-categories. Definitions of roles within the selling center (CN 211) have been mentioned sixteen times. Availability of relevant customer data (CN 212) was mentioned eleven times. Definition of a project plan (CN 213) was mentioned ten times. Transparency about the project status (CN 214) was mentioned nine times. The availability and usage of a common groupware (CN 215) was mentioned seven times. Knowledge about the importance of the project for the company (CN 216) was mentioned five times. Participation in a project kickoff (CN 217) was mentioned three times. Table 18 shows the results.

Table 18

Frequency analysis of transparency (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all codes	Participants	% of all p
CN 211	16	3.45	9	75.00
CN 212	11	2.37	6	50.00
CN 213	10	2.16	7	58.33
CN 214	9	1.94	7	58.33
CN 215	7	1.51	4	33.33
CN 216	5	1.08	3	25.00
CN 217	3	0.65	3	25.00

The second main category is *existence of a dispute resolution center*. According to Ellis and Kauferstein (2004), a dispute resolution center within a project is a hierarchical higher instance for mediation in case of a conflict. According to Ellis and Kauferstein (2004) and Geiger (2009), this usually belongs to the tasks of a steering committee. According to Biethahn, Mucksch and Ruf (2004), a steering committee is a committee made up of managerial positions within an organization. According to Mucksch and Ruf (2004), its main task is to determine the priorities of a project. According to Ellis and Kauferstein (2004), it is therefore equipped with the necessary formal authority to intervene in the course of the project.

The existence of a dispute resolution center (CN 221) was mentioned by one male participant at a low hierarchy level. Table 19 shows this result.

Table 19.

Frequency analysis of the existence of a dispute resolution center (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 221	1	0.22	1	8.33

Main category three is *voluntary participation*. It refers to the option of voluntarily participating in a selling center and the option to refuse participation. Participants whose codes form this category have positioned themselves against involuntary assignments to selling centers.

The main category of voluntary participation (CN 231) consists of three codes, accounting for 0.65% of all entries. One male and one female interview participant, each at a low hierarchy level, generated codes for this main category. Table 20 shows the result.

Table 20.

Frequency analysis of voluntary participation (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 231	3	0.65	2	16.67

The fourth main category is *possibility of personal meetings* for the selling center participants involved. Participants whose codes form this category have positioned themselves against purely virtual communication with their project manager and team colleagues.

Possibility of personal meetings (CN 241) consists of one code accounting for 0.22% of all codes. This main category was important to one female interview participant at a low hierarchical level. Table 21 shows the result.

Table 21

Frequency analysis of possibility of personal meetings (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 241	1	0.22	1	8.33

Main category five is *protection against disruptive factors* during the sales project. Text material relating to positive framework conditions within the selling center was also included in this main category, because according to Zielasek (1995), positive framework conditions refers to successful prevention against disruptive factors.

Protection against disruptive factors (CN 251) consists of three codes accounting for 0.65% of all codes. These were mentioned by one male and two female interview participants, and thus 25% of all interview participants. One interview participant was at a low hierarchical level and two interview participants at a middle hierarchical level. Table 22 presents the results.

Table 22

Frequency analysis of protection against disruptive factors (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 251	3	0.65	3	25.00

The sixth main category is *small team size*. There was no quantification of what the interview participants understand by small team size. However, according to

Gareis and Gareis (2017), the definition for the small size of a project team is a maximum of six participants.

Three interview participants generated codes for small team size (CN 261). Six codes represented 1.08% of all codes. This main category was generated by codes from two female and one male interview participant. All of them were at a low hierarchical level. Table 23 shows the results.

Table 23

Frequency analysis of small team size (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 261	5	1.08	3	25.00

3.6.3. Resources

According to Geiger, Romano, Gubelmann, Badertscher and Pifko (2006), project resources refer to people, materials, equipment, IT systems, knowledge and financial resources. According to Müller (2003), people cause the highest share of costs within a project. According to Finken (1999), they therefore form a separate resource group within project management consisting of subgroups. According to Hansel and Lomnitz (2003), these are time availability and qualification.

Twenty codes have been assigned to *resources* (CN 3), which represents 4.31% of all codes. 63% of male participants and 100% of female participants consider the availability of resources important. These represent 75% of the participants at a low hierarchy level and 50% of the participants at a high hierarchy level. Available time resources (CN 311) was mentioned twelve times. Resources that support completing the assigned tasks (CN 312) was mentioned seven times. Availability of qualified selling center participants (CN 313) was mentioned one time. Table 24 shows the results.

Table 24.

Frequency analysis of resources (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 311	12	2.59	7	58.33
CN 312	7	1.51	5	41.67
CN 312	1	0.22	1	8.33

3.6.4. Strategic orientation

Strategic orientation (CN 4) describes, according to Sackmann (2017), the joint pursuit of the employees of an organization of a higher-level goal and the orientation of their activities toward it. According to Wagner (2016), in project management, strategic orientation forms the foundation of the avoidance of independent and poorly targeted activities by individual employees. This category cluster consists of the main categories *goal orientation* and *customer orientation*.

The first main category is *goal orientation*. According to Toillié and Peemöller (1979), goal orientation means that the steering and coordination of activities are geared toward a defined goal. According to Becker (1994), a goal-oriented approach means that priorities and tasks are pursued that are most likely to contribute to achieving this goal. In addition to the successful completion of a sales project as an external goal, internal goal orientation such as cost reduction may also be possible (Kothandaranman, Agnihotri & Dingus, 2014).

The main category *goal orientation* (CN 41) consists of thirteen codes that represent a total of 2.80% of all codes. Goal orientation was important to 75% of male interview participants and 50% of female interview participants. These covered 100% of the interview participants on a high hierarchy level and 50% of the interview participants on a low hierarchy level. Six interview participants mentioned a goal-oriented approach (CN 411). Four participants mentioned a clear goal definition (CN 412). Three interview participants mentioned a high probability of successfully closing the sales project (CN 413). The results are presented in table 25.

Table 25.

Frequency analysis of goal orientation (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 411	6	1.29	4	33.33
CN 412	4	0.86	3	25.00
CN 413	3	0.65	3	25.00

The second main category was *customer orientation*. According to Mattes and Nohr (2007), customer orientation means a fundamental and permanent orientation of company thinking and action toward the needs of the customer. Customer orientation can conflict with goal orientation. This can be the case if the goal of a project is a successful completion at expense of a neutral and fair customer consultation.

Customer orientation (CN 421) has a total of six codes and represents 1.29% of all codes. Customer orientation was mentioned by 13% of male interview participants and 50% of female interview participants. Each interview participant was located at a low hierarchical level. Table 26 shows the results.

Table 26.

Frequency analysis of customer orientation (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 421	6	1.29	2	25.00

3.6.5 Factors at team level

The category cluster *factors at team level* (CN5) contains the main categories that address characteristics of colleagues within selling centers. This category cluster contains the following main categories:

- collegiality and affiliation
- motivated colleagues
- stress-resistant colleagues

The first main category of this category cluster is *collegiality and affiliation.* According to Kels (2018), collegiality and affiliation defines a cooperative attitude, respect, collegiality, openness, harmony, responsibility and trust within a team.

Collegiality and affiliation (CN 51) consists of thirty-nine codes and accounts for 8.41% of all codes. The codes were generated from 88% of male interview participants and 75% of female interview participants. These covered 88% of the interview participants on a high hierarchy level, and 50% of the participants on a low hierarchy level. Harmony (CN 511) was mentioned twenty-two times. Helpfulness and cooperation (CN 512) was mentioned eight times. An open feedback culture (CN 513) was mentioned three times. Fun (CN 514), coherence (CN 515) and fairness (CN 516) were each mentioned twice. Table 27 shows the results.

Table 27.

Frequency analysis of collegiality and affiliation (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 511	22	4.74	8	66.67
CN 512	8	1.72	6	50.00
CN 513	3	0.65	2	16.67
CN 514	2	0.43	2	16.67
CN 515	2	0.43	2	16.67
CN 516	2	0.43	2	16.67

The second main category of this category cluster is *motivated colleagues*. The interview participants mentioned motivated colleagues and a high willingness to perform within the team. According to Brandstätter, Schüler, Puca and Lozo (2018), willingness to perform is a synonym for motivation.

Three female interview participants on a low hierarchy level mentioned that colleagues in a selling center should be motivated (CN 521). Table 28 shows the results.

Table 28.

Frequency analysis of motivated colleagues (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 521	3	0.65	3	25.00

The third main category of this category cluster is *stress-resistant colleagues* within a selling center

Stress-resistant colleagues (CN 531) were mentioned by one female interview participant at a low hierarchical level. Table 29 presents the result.

Table 29

Frequency analysis of stress-resistant colleagues (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
CN 531	1	0.22	1	8.33

3.6.6. Big Five personality traits

The following main categories can be assigned to the category cluster *Big Five personality traits* (LR 1). This Big Five model is based on the fundamental research work of Stern (1900, as cited in Rauthmann, 2017, p. 8), who made a distinction between personality traits and states for a first time. Observable behavior, according to Amelang, Bartusek, Stemmler and Hagemann (2006), can be summarized as states. According to Amelang, Bartusek, Stemmler and Hagemann (2006), these are situational or time-related differences in the behavior of a person. Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson and Loftus (2007) and Hagemann (2006) distinguish these from traits that refer to manifestations of stable behavioral dispositions. According to Lindinger and Zeisel (2013), Müller (2013) and Magnus (2001), a characteristic of traits is that they are stable and cannot be changed by training or learning processes. According to Lindinger and Zeisel (2013) and Fehr (2006), the global state of the art in capturing and describing personality traits is the Big Five model. According to Asendorpf (2015), a total of 18,000 descriptive

property words[69] are summarized within the five dimensions of this model. Each dimension has two directions for expressions.

According to Lindinger and Zeisel (2013), these are:

- extraversion and introversion
- emotional lability and emotional stability
- agreeableness and cynicism
- conscientiousness and unconsciousness
- openness to experience and closeness

According to Trapmann (2008), each dimension consists of six different facets. These facets helped to assign sub-categories to the right personality traits.

The first main category is *extraversion*. Lord (2011) defines extraversion in its core meaning as the outward energy contribution of an individual and their need for external stimulation. According to Trapmann (2008), extraversion expresses itself through the six facets of warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement-seeking, and positive emotions. According to Asendopf (2015), extraversion is also to be understood as the lack of introversion. The terms communicativity and decision strength were mentioned by the interview participants. According to Asendorpf (2015), communicativity is a positive characteristic of gregariousness. Decision strength (LR 113), according to Asendorpf (2015), is a facet of assertiveness.

The main category *extraversion* (LR 11) consists of seven codes that represent 1.51% of all codes. These codes were generated by 25% of male interview participants and 50% of female interview participants, covering 38% of the interview participants at low hierarchy levels. Participants on a high hierarchy level did not mention subcategories of extraversion. Communicativity (LR 111) was mentioned five times. Extroversion[70] (LR 112) was mentioned once. Decision strength (LR 113) was also mentioned once. Table 30 shows the results.

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[69] The identification of these adjectives was based on the research work of Norman (1967) and Goldberg (1990).

[70] Duden (2016) points out that the terms extroversion and extraversion have the same meaning.

Table 30.

Frequency analysis of extraversion (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 111	5	1.08	3	25
LR 112	1	0.22	1	8.33
LR 113	1	0.22	1	8.33

The second main category is *stability*. Emotional stability, according to Felchenhauer (2017), is the opposite of neuroticism. According to Trapmann (2008), neuroticism consists of the facets anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness and vulnerability. The subcategories summarized in this main category are negative versions of these facets. According to Asendorpf (2015), simplicity is a negative expression of self-consciousness. Serenity, which in analogy to the Dudenredaktion (2016) is a synonym for balance, is, according to Assendorpf (2015), a negative expression of impulsiveness.

Stability (LR 12) consists of two codes and accounts for 0.43% of all codes. Only male interview participants at low hierarchy levels generated codes. They mentioned simplicity (LR 121) and balance (LR 122) once. Table 31 shows the results.

Table 31.

Frequency analysis of stability (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 121	1	0.22	1	8.33
LR 122	1	0.22	1	8.33

The third main category is *agreeableness*. According to Ekert and Ekert (2010), agreeableness describes the degree of social attitudes and the degree of interest in human relationships. According to Trapmann (2008), the facets of agreeableness include trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness. According to Brosi and Spörrle (2012), the opposite of agreeableness is contentiousness.

The main category agreeableness (LR 13) contains three codes and accounts for 0.65% of all codes. The subcategories were mentioned by 25% of male interview participants and 25% of female interview participants. These represented 13% of the participants at a low hierarchy level, and 50% of the participants at a high hierarchy level. Modest/y (LR 131) was mentioned by two interview participants. Altruism[71] (LR 132) was mentioned by one interview participant. The results are presented in table 32.

Table 32.

Frequency analysis of agreeableness (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 131	2	0.44	2	16.67
LR 132	1	0.22	1	8.33

Conscientiousness is the fourth main category in this category cluster. According to Lang (2009), people with conscientiousness feel committed to their goals, are loyal and are characterized by compliant behavior.[72] According to Robertson et al. (2000, as cited in Obermann, 2013, p. 69), people with a high degree of conscientiousness tend to have strongly organized work behavior and pay more attention to details. According to Trapmann (2008), conscientiousness consists of the facets of competence, order, pleasure, achievement striving, self-discipline and deliberation. According to Asendorpf (2015), reliability is a positive expression of conscientiousness.

[71] The generalization *a project leader should be free of selfish interest* was classified as altruism, as suggested by Batson (2011, cited after Huber, Applemann & Lenzen, 2016, p. 17). This classification into altruism has been augmented by the results of the experimental research of Daniel Batson (1943, as cited in Levine & Manning, 2014, p. 62).

[72] This fact makes conscientiousness relevant in research as a predictor of different characteristics. According to Asendorpf (2015), it is considered the best predictor of service quality. According to Obermann (2013), it is also regarded as a predictor of career success or as a so-called success index.

Reliability (LR 141) has four codes and accounts for 0.65% of all codes. 17% of male interview participants and 13% of interview female interview participants mentioned reliability. These cover 50% of participants in middle hierarchy levels, and 13% of participants in high hierarchy levels. Table 33 presents the results.

Table 33

Frequency analysis of conscientiousness (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 141	4	0.86	2	16.67

The fifth main category is *openness to experiences*. According to Trapmann (2008), it describes how accessible a person is regarding fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas or values. Openness to newness is, according to Zuckerman (1994, cited in Lord, 2011, p. 22), a positive expression of this trait and describes the search for new sensations and social nonconformity.

Openness to experience (LR 15) has six codes and accounts for 1.29% of all codes. 25% of male interview participants and 50% of female interview participants mentioned subcategories of openness to experience. These cover 38% of interview participants on a low hierarchical level. Interview participants on a high hierarchical level did not produce any mentions. Openness to newness (LR 151) was mentioned four times and openness to ideas (LR 152) twice. The results are shown in Table 34.

Table 34

Frequency analysis of openness to experience (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 151	4	0.86	3	25.00
LR 152	2	0.43	1	8.33

3.6.7. Intelligence

In addition to the term intelligence, the presence of common sense was also mentioned. According to Iglhaut (2008), common sense is synonymous with reason, which, according to Yang and Sternberg (1997, as cited in Maltby, Day & Macaskill, 2011, p 483), serves as a description of intelligence from the perspective of a layman.

One male interview participant at a low hierarchical level generated two codes that can be assigned to intelligence (LR 211). These accounts for 0.43% of all mentions. Table 35 presents the results.

Table 35.

Frequency analysis of intelligence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 211	2	0.43	2	16.67

3.6.8 Competences and key competences

According to Schweizer (2006), the definition of *competence* can vary depending on the respective scientific discipline. Therefore it is necessary to classify this term appropriately.

According to Lenbet (2007), the concept of competence emerged in the early military-industrial complex of the 19th century and described the responsibility, authority or legality of an organ, institution or person. According to Schiersmann (2007), in the mid-1990s, the term competence was used to describe education and key qualifications. According to Hasselhorn (2015), at the end of the 1990s, this definition was criticized by the Max Planck Institute as too unclear for scientific concerns. According to Hasselhorn (2015), January Weiner from the Max Planck Institute compiled a catalog of requirements in 2001 to provide an even more pragmatic definition of competence:

- Competences refer to necessary conditions to be able to handle complex requirements. The psychological structure of a competence results from the logical and psychological structure of the respective requirement.

- Competences should be used when motivational, ethical, volitional, and/or social components are needed to cope with a situation.
- In order to meet the respective requirement a sufficient level of complexity should be demanded. Fully automated skills are delineated from competences, but the line between competence and automated skills is blurred.
- Competences have to be learned, but cannot be taught directly.

Weinert (2001, as cited in Hasselhorn, 2015, p. 16) also distinguished competences from so-called key competences. According to Coelen and Otto (2008), key competences describe a qualitative extension of the concept of competence for competences that are necessary for the personal and social development of people in modern and complex societies. According to Kabo (2009), key competences can be classified into three categories defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD):

- interactive use of media and resources
- interaction in heterogeneous groups
- autonomous agency

However, the distinction between competences and key competences is criticized by Müller (2008), since there is neither a sufficient theoretical foundation nor sufficient empirical foundation from both the perspective of the educational and employment system. No distinction was made in this work either. Thus, the category cluster *competences and key competences* (LR 3) was created. The following main categories were assigned to this category cluster:

- conceptual-analytical competence
- social-communicative competence
- technical-methodical competence
- conveyance competence
- error competence and ability to deal with criticism
- management competence

The first main category of this category cluster is *conceptual-analytical competence*. According to Eberl and Schreyögg (2015), conceptual-analytical competence describes the ability to structure complex problem areas and transform them into a manageable concept of action. Furthermore, according to Freyer and Pompl (2008), this term describes the ability to recognize problems and

opportunities in the context of an entire system, as well as to establish long-term goals and strategic paths.

The main category *conceptual-analytical competence* (LR 31) consists of fourteen codes and accounts for 6.68% of all codes. The codes were generated from 58% of male interview participants and 75% of female interview participants. These interview participants covered 63% of the interview participants on low hierarchical levels, and 50% of the interview participants on high hierarchical levels. Goal orientation (LR 311) was mentioned five times. Conceptual skills (LR 312), analytical skills (LR 313), prioritization skills (LR 314), and structuredness (LR 315) were mentioned twice each. The ability to estimate success probabilities (LR 316) was once mentioned. The results are shown in Table 36.

Table 36.

Frequency analysis of conceptual-analytical competence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 311	5	1.08	3	25.00
LR 312	2	0.43	1	8.33
LR 313	2	0.43	2	16.67
LR 314	2	0.43	2	16.67
LR 315	2	0.43	2	16.67
LR 316	1	0.22	1	8.33

The second main category is *social-communicative competence*. According to Eberl and Schreyögg (2015), social-communicative competences describe cooperation and communication skills as well as empathy. According to North, Reinhardt and Sieber-Sutter (2018), social-communicative competences also include the ability to motivate. Košinár (2014) also complements the presence of conflict capacity to describe social-communicative competences.

Social-communicative competence (LR 32) has thirty-one codes and accounts for 6.31% of all codes. 88% of the male interview participants and 75% of the female

interview participants mentioned terms assigned to this main category. These interview participants covered 87.5% of the interview participants on low hierarchical levels and 100% of the interview participants on high hierarchical levels. Helpfulness and cooperation (LR 321) was mentioned twelve times. Empathy (LR 322) and the ability to motivate (LR 323) were mentioned five times. Conflict capacity (LR 324) was mentioned four times and communication ability (LR 325) twice. Table 37 shows the results.

Table 37.

Frequency analysis of social-communicative competence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 321	12	2.59	7	58.33
LR 322	8	1.72	3	25.00
LR 323	4	0.86	3	25.00
LR 324	5	1.08	4	33.33
LR 325	2	0.43	2	16.67

Technical-methodical competence is the third main category. According to Schreyögg and Eberl (2015), technical-methodological competence includes technical and instrumental knowledge, as well as the ability to use that knowledge for problem solving and apply it to specific cases. However, technical methodological competence is not limited to the technical area. According to Wilrodt (2004) and Schommers (2013), technical-methodical competence can also be considered as sales competence when applying it in selling situations. According to Fauler (2014), the following five characteristics refer to technical-methodical competence applied in selling situations:

- completion-oriented action in direct customer contact
- structured and argumentative conversation
- the recognition of sales opportunities and their use
- systematic analysis of customer situations and needs
- demand-oriented advice to the customer

With eleven codes, technical-methodical competences accounts for 2.73% of all codes. 88% of all male interview participants and 75% of all female interview participants generated codes for this main category. These represented all participants of lower hierarchy levels and 50% of participants of high hierarchy levels. Technical understanding (LR 331) was mentioned twenty times. Sales competence (LR 332) was mentioned six times, and being well-versed in the product portfolio (LR 333) three times. Industry experience (LR 334) was mentioned twice. Table 38 shows the results.

Table 38.

Frequency analysis of technical-methodical competence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 331	20	4.31	10	83.33
LR 332	6	1.29	3	25.00
LR 333	3	0.65	1	8.33
LR 334	2	0.43	2	16.67

*T*he fourth main category is *conveyance competence*. According to Luttermann (2010, as cited in Luttermann & Schäble, 2016, p. 426), conveyance competence describes the appropriate and addressee-oriented transfer of knowledge. According to Schön (2016), conveyance competence can refer to both linguistic, written and digital communication levels.

Conveyance competence (LR 34) was mentioned twice and accounts for 0.43% of all codes. Two male interview participants, at a high hierarchy level, mentioned the knowledge transfer of subject matter (LR 341). Table 39 shows the results.

Table 39.

Frequency analysis of conveyance competence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 341	2	0.43	2	16.67

The fifth main category is *error competence and ability to deal with criticism*. According to Donle (2007), error competence is understood to mean all skills in dealing with errors. According to Dyck (2000, cited after Donle, 2007, p. 182), these are communication of errors, analysis and correction of errors and learning from mistakes. According to Berschneider (2003), dealing with criticisms complements error competence by openness to criticism, ability to reflect and willingness to improve performance and behavior. According to Sedlacek (2015), this requires both high self-assessment skills and self-control.

Error competence and the ability to deal with criticism (LR 35) consists of eleven codes and represents 2.37% of all codes. The codes were generated by 25% of male interview participants and 75% of female interview participants. These cover 38% of the participants on a low hierarchical level and 0% on a high hierarchical level. Openness in dealing with one's own mistakes and deficits (LR 351) was mentioned seven times. Willingness to learn from mistakes (LR 352) and passive criticism (LR 353) were mentioned twice each. Table 40 presents the results.

Table 40.

Frequency analysis of error competence and ability to deal with criticism (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 351	7	1.51	4	33.33
LR 352	2	0.43	1	8.33
LR 353	2	0.43	1	8.33

Management competence is the sixth main category in this category cluster. According to Behle and Hofe (2014), it includes planning, organization, controls and coordination skills. According to Behle and Hofe (2014), these characteristics can also refer to project management competence. However, project management competence according to Schmidthals (2007) is exclusively about the existence of experience, which is not competence in the sense of the definition as presented above. Therefore the term management competence was used.

Management competence (LR 36) consists of thirteen codes that cover 2.80% of all codes. 75% of all male interview participants and 25% of female interview participants generated codes. These cover 50% of the interview participants on low hierarchy levels and 100% of the interview participants on high hierarchy levels. Project planning and project control (LR 361) was mentioned nine times. Delegation capability (LR 362) was mentioned four times. Table 41 shows the results.

Table 41.

Frequency analysis of management competence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 361	9	1.94	6	50.00
LR 362	4	0.86	4	33.33

3.6.9. Experience

In Duden (2018), experience is understood as knowledge or routine within a specific area. These areas are, according to Fischer (2007), life experience, everyday experience and work experience. In this survey, life experience and work experience were mentioned. According to Kirchmann (1998), these terms do not define cumulative lifetime or occupational periods, but relate to certain situations faced. Experience supports individuals in building certain skills. For example, according to Fischer (2007), human skills can be learned as part of specific life situations, while some professional competences can be learned through specific work situations.

The main category *experience* (LR 4), contains of nine codes and accounts for 1.94% of all codes. 63% of male interview participants and 25% of female interview participants generated codes. These covered 38% of all interview participants at a low hierarchy level, and 100% of all interview participants at a high hierarchy level. Professional experience (LR 411) was mentioned eight times and life experience (LR 412) was mentioned one time. Table 42 shows the results.

Table 42.

Frequency analysis of experience (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 411	8	1.72	6	50.00
LR 412	1	0.22	1	8.33

3.6.10. Personal attitude

The main categories below can be summarized in the category cluster *personal attitudes* (LR 5). According to Rosenberg and Hovland (1960, as cited in Einwiller, 2003, p. 67), attitudes describe predispositions of an individual to respond to a certain class of stimuli with a certain type of behavior.[73] Thus, according to Eberl (2006), they form a determinant of planned behavior. These stimuli are each sent from an attitude object. According to Ströbe (1980, as cited in Bierhoff, 1986, p. 279), attitudes are based on feelings or opinions that help to rate this attitude object as positive or negative. According to Rosenberg (1989, as cited by Fischer, Jander & Krüger, 2018, p. 96), an attitude object is not specified and can be an activity, other people or the respective individual itself. The following main categories are summarized in this category cluster:

- self-confidence
- willingness to take risks
- responsibility
- engagement and self-initiative
- ethical values
- collegiality
- congruence

The first main category of this category cluster is self-confidence. According to Pletzer (2010), self-confidence means awareness of one's own abilities and qualities. According to Lörsch (2015), the general understanding of this term also

[73] According to Katzengruper (2010), this behavior based on attitudes takes place unconsciously.

includes the conviction of one's own abilities and the expression of them in a confident manner.

Self-confidence (LR 511) was mentioned by one male interview participant on a middle hierarchy level. He generated one code that accounts for 0.22% of all codes. Table 43 shows the results.

Table 43

Frequency analysis of self-confidence (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 511	1	0.22	1	8.33

The second main category is *willingness to take risks*. According to Schamel (2010), willingness to take risks means a need to take on risky situations and the resulting satisfaction from them.

Willingness to take risks (LR 521) was mentioned by one female interview participant at a low hierarchical level. She generated one code that accounted for 0.22% of all codes. Table 44 shows the result.

Table 44

Frequency analysis of willingness to take risks (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 521	1	0.22	1	8.33

The third main category is *willingness to take responsibility*. According to Reiber (2005), responsibility means being committed to a cause, pursuing it in a sustainable manner and carrying out an impact assessment of one's own actions.

Willingness to take responsibility (LR 531) was mentioned by one male interview participant on a low hierarchical level. He generated one code that accounted to 0.22% of all codes. Table 45 shows the results.

Table 45.

Frequency analysis of willingness to take responsibility (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 531	1	0.22	1	8.33

The fourth main category is *engagement and self-initiative*. Both terms describe similar concepts. According to Barkley (2010), motivation is considered a requirement for commitment.[74] According to Duden (2018), engagement is expressed by a personal commitment based on a sense of duty. Self-initiative, according to Becker and Pastoors (2018), is also based on motivation. According to Becker and Pastoors (2018) it is expressed by a willingness to change and participate, to volunteer for a goal, and to act swiftly. Both engagement and self-initiative describe a readiness for actions resulting out of motivation. However, according to Giardini and Frese (2006), self-initiative is, by comparison, characterized more by proactivity.

The main category engagement and self-initiative (LR 54) consists of fourteen codes, accounting for 3.02% of all codes. 75% of all interviewed male and female interview participants generated codes for this main category. These cover 88% of all participants on a low hierarchical level, and 50% of all participants on a high hierarchical level. Engagement (LR 541) was mentioned seven times, motivation (LR 542) was mentioned four times, and self-initiative (LR 543) was mentioned three times. Table 46 shows the results.

[74] In the literature, engagement has also been found as a synonym used for motivation, for example in Epp (2017).

Table 46

Frequency analysis of engagement and self-initiative (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR541	7	1.51	5	41.67
LR542	4	0.86	3	25.00
LR543	3	0.65	3	25.00

The fifth main category is *ethical values*. According to Zsifkovtis (2005), ethics means good and correct behavior, which, however, can be defined differently in each ethical system. According to Radtke (2015), ethical values in the context of leadership are sincerity, loyalty, benevolence, and fairness.

Ethical values (LR 55) consists of eleven codes, representing 2.37% of all codes. 38% of male interview participants and 75% of female interview participants generated codes. These interview participants include 38% of all interview participants on a low hierarchy, and 50% of all interview participants on a high hierarchy. Sincerity (LR 551) was mentioned five times, fairness (LR 552) was mentioned four times and loyalty to the organization (LR 553) was mentioned two times. Table 47 presents the results.

Table 47.

Frequency analysis of ethical values (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 551	5	1.08	3	25.00
LR 552	4	0.86	2	16.67
LR 553	2	0.43	1	8.33

The sixth main category is *collegiality*. According to Wiedermann (2015), collegiality and partnership within a leadership context means the recognition of employees as equal, respecting them as human beings, and respecting and tolerating their ways of thinking and behaving. In German-speaking countries, the

terms collegiality and partnership, according to the Duden (2019), are also used as a synonym for mutual support. According to Daser (2011), this is made possible through a trustful, cooperative and helpful form of cooperation.

Collegiality and partnership (LR 56) consists of twenty-five codes and represents 5.39% of all codes. 88% of male interview participants and 75% of female interview participants generated codes for this main category. These cover 75% of all interview participants on a low hierarchical level as well as all interview participants on a high hierarchical level. Respectful interaction with each other (LR 561) was mentioned seventeen times. Benevolent interaction with each other (LR 562) was mentioned four times. A willingness to listen (LR 563) and the amicable handling of selling center participants (LR 564) were each mentioned twice. Table 48 shows the results.

Table 48

Frequency analysis of collegiality (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 561	17	3.66	7	58.33
LR 562	4	0.86	4	33.33
LR 563	2	0.43	1	8.33
LR 564	2	0.43	2	16.67

Main category six of this category cluster is *congruence*. According to Fux (2005), congruence describes the agreement between two constructs. With reference to a person, Pipe (2017) holds that their inner feelings coincide with their behavior. Perception of congruence happens when, according to Bentlage (2016), words, intonation, and body language match each other. According to Eckert (2006), a lack of congruence leads to incongruence. According to Michon, Chebat and Turley (2001, as cited in Müller, 2012, p. 127), incongruence can lead to an unpleasant condition for the interlocutors involved. According to Habertleitner, Deistler and Ungvari (2007), the term congruence (LR 57) also describes characteristics like genuineness, coherence and authenticity.

One male interview participant at a low hierarchical level generated the code congruent behavior (LR 571). He mentioned it two times, thus it represents 0.43% of all codes. Table 49 shows the result.

Table 49.

Frequency analysis of congruence (source: author's representation).

Sub category	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LR 571	2	0.43	1	8.33

3.6.11. Work instruction

The subcategories presented below refer to accurate and clear work instructions by a project manager of a selling center.

Accuracy and clarity of work instructions (IN 1) summarizes fifty-two codes and takes into account 11.21% of all codes. 100% of the male interview participants and 75% of the female interview participants mentioned at least one of its subcategories. All interview participants that are clearly on a low or high hierarchy level generated codes. A precise task description (IN 111) was mentioned twenty-eight times. The knowledge of the reason, for work instructions (IN 112) was mentioned twelve times. The clear definition of a deadline for an assigned task (IN 113) was mentioned ten times. The knowledge of the required quality standard (IN 114) was mentioned twice. Table 50 shows the results.

Table 50.

Frequency analysis of accuracy and clarity of work instructions (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
IN 111	28	6.03	11	91.67
IN 112	12	2.59	8	66.67
IN 113	10	2.16	7	58.33
IN 114	2	0.43	1	8.33

3.6.12. Leadership style

The following main categories can be assigned to the category cluster *leadership style*. According to Scholz (2000, as cited in Knecht, Pifko & Züger, 2011, p. 34), a leadership style (LS 1) can be understood as the fundamental maxim of action of a leader, which remains constant over a longer period of time. This category cluster includes the following main categories:

- situational leadership
- authoritarian leadership
- participatory leadership
- charismatic leadership

The first main category of this category cluster is *situational leadership*. According to Jetter and Skrotzki (2005), situational leadership means choosing an appropriate leadership style, depending on the leadership situation. According to Fresow (2018), the spectrum of leadership styles ranges from authoritarian leadership to cooperative leadership. Thus, according to Lieber (2007), situational leadership offers the option to shift from a cooperative leadership style to an authoritarian leadership style in times of pressure, catastrophes, or employees who are very difficult to manage. According to Schirmer and Woydt (2012, as cited in Pipus, 2015, p.184), this leadership style is also useable for taking into account the degree of employee maturity. Schwinning (2016) differentiates between four different levels of maturity, to which the situational leadership style allows an adjustment:

- Maturity Level 1: less motivated employees with low skills should be led with a directive leadership style
- Maturity Level 2: motivated employees with low skills should be led with an instructive leadership style
- Maturity Level 3: employees with low motivation and high skills should be led with a coaching leadership style
- Maturity level 4: employees with high motivation and high skills should be led with a delegating leadership style

Nine codes have been assigned to situational leadership (LS 11) and thus 1.94% of all codes. Two male interview participants on a lower hierarchical level, two male interview participants on a middle hierarchical level and two male interview participants on a high hierarchical level generated codes. The degree of

maturity per selling center participant (LS 111) was mentioned seven times. A change to an authoritarian leadership style in times of pressure (LS 112) was mentioned twice. Table 51 shows the results.

Table 51.

Frequency analysis of situational leadership (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LS 111	7	1.51%	4	33.33
LS 112	2	0.43%	2	16.67

The second main category is *authoritarian leadership*. According to Laufer (2005), the term authority derives from the Latin term *auctoritas*, which means personal standing or validity. If an authoritarian leadership style is used, then, according to Junge (2010), employees are given limited possibilities to question instructions. Furthermore, the performance and activities of employees are regularly checked unannounced, which prevents a situation where the will of the leader could be questioned. However, there are different grades of authority, by which the employees can be led. According to Junge (2010), in practice, a pure form of authoritarian leadership style is rarely used.

The main category *authoritarian leadership style* (LS 12) consists of nine codes that take into account 1.94% of all codes. 38% of all male interview participants and 75% of all female interview participants generated codes. All interview participants were on a low hierarchy level. Enforcement of one's own will (LS 121) was mentioned six times and authoritarian leadership (LS 122) three times. The results are shown in Table 52.

Table 52.

Frequency analysis of authoritarian leadership (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LS 121	6	1.29%	5	41.67
LS 122	3	0.65%	3	25.00

The third main category is *participatory leadership*. According to Schmelter (2009), participatory leadership means involving employees in decision-making processes. Similar to the authoritarian leadership style, there can also be different gradations in the participatory leadership style. According to Schmelter (2009), an extreme form of this leadership style is when even definitions of objectives are left to the respective working groups. According to Brodbeck (2016), participatory leadership enjoys a high reputation, especially in an intercultural comparison of different leadership styles. According to Häusler (1977, as cited in Claas, 2006, p. 146), participatory leadership is used in practice mostly when operations are either not or not routinely practicable, and when problem solutions should be developed within the team.

Nineteen codes can be assigned to the main category participatory leadership (LS 13). They account for 4.09% of all codes. Half of all male interview participants as well as all female interview participants generated codes. These covered 63% of all participants at a low hierarchical level and 50% of all participants at a high hierarchical level. The involvement of selling center participants in decision-making processes (LS 131) was mentioned fourteen times. The involvement within the entire sales project (LS 132) was mentioned three times. Table 53 shows the results.

Table 53.

Frequency analysis of participatory leadership (source: author's representation).

Subcategory	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LS 131	14	3.02%	6	50.00
LS 132	3	0.65%	3	25.00

The fourth main category is *charismatic leadership*. Charismatic leadership is defined by Weber (1980, as cited in Pundt, 2012, p. 30) as the counterpart to bureaucracy. While authoritarian or participatory leadership describes the way a leader interacts with their staff, charismatic leadership, according to Herbig (2005), is generated through the leader's personal appearance and unique personality traits. According to Ueberschaer (2014), charisma is attributed to a leader if he is perceived as a role model. According to Hub (1988), charismatic leaders expect self-

sacrifice, promising that a difficult time will be overcome by their leadership. According to Brabandt (2016), another characteristic of charismatic leaders is that they demand an unrestricted claim to domination.

Charismatic leadership style (LS 14) consist of eight codes, which take into account 1.72% of all codes. 63% of male interview participants and 25% of female interview participants generated codes. 50% of all interview participants at a low hierarchy level and 50% of all interview participants at a high hierarchy level generated codes. The subcategory role model (LS 141) was mentioned seven times, and the subcategory charismatic leadership (LS 142) was mentioned one time. Table 54 shows the results.

Table 54.

Frequency analysis of charismatic leadership (source: author's representation).

Sub category	Codes	% of all Codes	Participants	% of all Part.
LS 141	7	1.51	5	41.67
LS 142	1	0.22	1	8.33

3.7. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

According to Götze (2019), the interpretation of qualitative research results pursues the goal of giving a holistic and realistic assessment of the knowledge gained. According to Auer-Srnka (2009), creative knowledge-building processes are used to recognize and present the logic behind the results. According to Sievers (2009), an important aspect of the interpretation is the reference to existing theories in order to examine the representativeness of individual cases. This chapter's answers will take into account the following research questions:

- Research question 1: an interpretation of all factors with regard to generating acceptance of leadership in selling centers is presented
- Research question 3: an assessment is made as to whether and how these factors can be influenced in practice

According to Brüsemeister (2008), Kuckartz (2010) and Meyen, Löblich, Pfaff-Rüdiger and Riesmeyer (2011), qualitative studies can, in principle, be seen as critical in relation to a population because the samples sizes are so small. Since the

sample size does not allow conclusions to be drawn about subgroups of the population, it is not yet possible to answer research question 2. According to Scheu, Vogelgesang and Scharkow (2018) and Kuckartz (1999), however, frequencies analyzed can give indications about similarities and differences between subgroups. This assumption is based on the idea described by Bortz and Döring (2003) that the number of frequencies correlates positively with the relevance of certain categories. According to Schira (2009), these indications can be used as a basis for deriving hypotheses.[75] As a guideline, based on Mayring (2010, cited in Oswald, 2019, p. 75), differences between subgroups were assumed if frequencies were particularly noticeable or of particular theoretical interest.[76]

Töpfer (2009) suggests avoiding formulating too many hypotheses, as this can lead to a lack of clarity. Therefore, no hypotheses were derived at the level of the ninety-four subcategories. Another aspect that has to be considered, according to Bühner (2012), is that hypotheses may only cover one issue at a time. Since the category clusters can cover several issues, the hypotheses were derived on the level of the main categories.

3.7.1. Performance incentives

According to Portny (2019), employees volunteer for projects if they feel they can achieve personal or professional goals. One way to support employees in achieving these goals is to offer performance incentives (CN 11). According to Busse (2012), the technical terms for performance incentives that support these two types of goals are personal and institutional performance incentives. According to Venkatesh, Kohli and Zaltmann (1995), performance incentives are predominant in interfirm contexts, such as sales projects, and less so in intrafirm contexts. According to Hinz (2013), it is important for a project manager to know the motivational direction of employees for choosing the right performance incentive in order to motivate them. Based on the results of this study, roughly three

[75] A similar procedure was used by Schoenwald (2015).

[76] It is noticeable that in the literature, there are no universal suggestions regarding an interpretation of different deviations between frequencies. According to Pauschenwein, Pernold, Goldgruber and Sfiri (2014), the researcher themself is responsible for a correct interpretation.

motivational directions of selling center participants related to performance incentives can be distinguished in *rewards* (CN 112, CN 114, CN 116), *recognition* (CN 113, CN 115, CN 117) and *professional development* (CN 111). The frequency analysis showed in an intergroup comparison that this main category was in the high double-digit percentage range for all subgroups. Based on the results presented, it can be assumed that performance incentives are important for the acceptance of leadership for the majority of participants within a selling center regardless of their gender or hierarchy level. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_1: If selling center participants can receive performance incentives, they participate in a selling center voluntarily.

The possibilities for influencing the above-mentioned forms of performance incentives are discussed below. Rewards can basically be provided if a sufficient budget is available.[77] However, it is noticeable that according to Brown, Evans, Mantrale and Challagalla (2013), with the exception of the internal customer-supplier model, there are currently very few approaches in the literature that deal intensively with the rewarding in selling centers. Recognition referred to both the project manager and third parties. While the project manager can give recognition directly to a selling center participant, according to Tiemeyer (2018), third parties can be influenced indirectly with project marketing tools to give them recognition.[78] Professional development can be influenced, at least indirectly, by the development of skills during a sales project. However, according to Hinz (2013), the project manager should check in advance into areas where professional development is desired by the project participants. Thus, it is possible to take these areas into account and to assign tasks that can develop the required skills for jobs in these areas.

[77] According to Kalkowski and Mickler (2009), rewards should be linked to individual target agreements.

[78] For this purpose, Tiemeyer (2018) refers to information events, presentations, articles within the intranet, newsletters, information forums and information brochures.

3.7.2. Structural framework conditions

According to Lord (2001, as cited in Lang and Rybnikova, 2014, p. 70)) and von Rosenstiel (2004), the structural framework (CN 2) of a leadership situation influences the implicit ideas of a prototypical leader. As a result, their relevance in terms of acceptance of leadership seems justified. The individual main categories are discussed below. The assessment of their ability to be influenced is presented at the end of this subchapter.

The first main category is *transparency* (CN 21). According to Biesel (2004), transparency is associated positively with the success of sales projects. This result of the study is supported by the recognition that communication of information favors the success of attempts to influence (Claro, Neto & Claro, 2013, as cited in Kothandaranman, Agnihotri & Dingus, 2014, p. 147). Missing transparence, for example, by having knowledge about a customer through just one sales associate while multiple experts from different areas are involved in the respective sales process, is no longer adequate according to Tanner, Ahearne, Leigh, Mason and Moncrief (2005). According to Demleitner (2009), transparency ensures that participants identify with a project, feel involved in a project and can classify the meaning of their work within a project. In summary, transparency has a positive effect on the acceptance of the leadership context. However, Kunz (2007) warns that excessive perception of transparency can lead to the participants of a project feeling controlled. The frequency analysis showed that interview participants of all subgroups mentioned transparency as a factor. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_2: If selling center participants perceive a sales project as transparent, they participate in a selling center voluntarily.

The second main category is *existence of a dispute resolution center* (CN 221). While transparency supports the likelihood of the acceptance of leadership within selling centers, a dispute resolution center reduces the likelihood that acceptance will be reduced. According to Lucks and Meckl (2002), a dispute resolution center can prevent project teams[79] from the negative consequences of conflicts like instability, confusion, stress, dissatisfaction, as well as disruptions in communication and cooperation. According to Märgen Schmalz (2019), such social conflicts lead to non-acceptance within project teams. This main category was mentioned by one interview participant so that an assumption about distributions between subgroups does not seem appropriate. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_3: If there is a dispute resolution center for a selling center, selling center participants participate voluntarily.

The third main category is *voluntary participation* (CN 231). According to Krüger (2010), participants who voluntarily take part in projects believe that they belong to a functioning and trustworthy team. By contrast, forced participation in projects has a negative impact. According to Witteck (2014), if participants were assigned to a project without being asked beforehand or without their consent, they would show neither commitment nor enthusiasm for the project. Acceptance of the leadership context is therefore not likely. This main category is one of the smallest main categories and only consists of codes from two interview participants. An assumption about distributions between subgroups does not seem appropriate based on this database. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_4: If selling center participants can refuse to participate in a selling center, they will participate voluntarily.

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[79] In addition to conflicts within a project team, a dispute resolution center can also be used to mediate in case of conflicts between project managers and line managers. However, according to Zell (2017), when appointing the dispute resolution center, care should be taken to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest. An article by Wyld (2015) deals in particular with the negative effects of existing conflicts on selling center performance.

The fourth main category is *possibility for personal meetings*. According to Peemöller and Kregel (2010), personal meetings are a prerequisite for project participants for being able to identify with a project. These meetings can take place, for example, in the form of a project kickoff or through jours fixes. Especially in larger projects according to Borchardt (2006), several meetings are required to cultivate a sense of community, cohesion and motivation. According to Krüth (2018) and Müller (2011), personal meetings are particularly necessary at the beginning of projects, but lose importance in later stages. This main category was mentioned by one interview participant so that an assumption about distributions between subgroups did not seem appropriate. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_5: If selling center participants have the opportunity for personal meetings, they participate in a selling center voluntarily.

The fifth main category is *protection against disruptive factors* (CN 251). According to Reuschenbach (2012), it is the task and responsibility of a project manager to protect project participants against disturbing factors. Unexpected external influences are, according to Zotzmann (2014), an especially frequent reason for the failure of projects. According to Lange (2016), protection against disruptive factors also forms the basis for a positive working atmosphere within a project team, and thus has a positive impact on the acceptance of the respective project team as a leadership context. This main category was mentioned by three interview participants who represent all defined subgroups by gender and hierarchy level. A statement about differences between subgroups does not seem appropriate under these circumstances. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_6: If selling center participants are protected from external disruptive factors, they participate in a selling center voluntarily.

The sixth main category is *small team* size (CN 261). According to Steinbrecher and Müll-Schnurr (2014), the project management standard PRINCE 2 also recommends the smallest possible team size for project teams. As there was no quantification during the interviews, a quantification based on existing literature will be presented. In the literature there are suggestions of a maximum of between

six to ten project participants.[80] According to Prefi (2014), small project teams have a positive effect on timing, overcoming the difficulties of interdependencies, as well as a division of labor and synchronization within groups. If there is a large project team, according to Voigt and Thiell (2003), the potential of goal conflicts and non-task-related conflicts increases with a larger team size, which has a potentially negative effect on identification with a group and the acceptance of participation in it. According to Ruf and Fittkau (2008), further challenges can be seen in an exponentially increasing need for communication. Like the previous main category, three interview participants who were heterogeneously distributed over the different subgroups mentioned small team size. An assumption about how subgroups typically are was also not considered appropriate for this main category. The following hypothesis can be formed:

H_7: If the size of the selling center team is less than six participants, selling center participants participate voluntarily.

The factors mentioned can generally be influenced. However, main categories such as *existence of a dispute resolution center*, for example, make it clear that companies therefore must understand selling centers as project teams. Another conclusion is that the project manager must be given the necessary skills and knowledge, for example, to ensure transparency within a project by using communication management or to manage external disruptive factors.[81]

3.7.3. Resources

Resources are a critical factor when it comes to an interdisciplinary sales process (Dixon & Tanner, 2012). Missing resources (CN 3), in particular at the start of a project, have been identified as a main reason for failure by GPM Deutsche Gesellschaft für Projektmanagement eV and the PA Consulting Group (2004, as cited in Zell, 2018, p. 13-14). According to Hansel and Lomnitz (2003), when project

[80] For example, Gareis and Gareis (2017) suggest not exceeding a total of six participants, while Prefi (2014) sees a critical mass of up to ten people for efficient cooperation.

[81] According to Hobel and Schütte (2006), the equipping of a project manager with appropriate competences can be seen as critical to success.

participants recognize a lack of resources, this generally leads to dissatisfaction. According to Bohinc (2012), dissatisfied project participants are likely to refuse to work on assigned tasks. This means that leadership, which in the understanding of this work requires a reaction from the person to be influenced, is not possible. At least half of the participants of all subgroups mentioned resources as a factor for the acceptance of leadership within selling centers. Therefore, resources seem to be important regardless of the affiliation with a subgroup. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_8: If the required resources are available for the sales project, selling center participants participate in a selling center voluntarily.

According to Jensen (2004), the control over company-internal resources by a project manager of a selling center is rather low. However, the availability of resources can be influenced if necessary requirements are met. According to Neumann (2012), the responsibility to provide resources and enforce them through escalations is one of the tasks of a project manager. However, according to Ries (2018), this presupposes concrete escalation processes and escalation mechanisms within an organization. Without these, the impact on resource sharing can be highly dependent on the sympathy of line managers who are responsible for managing the required resources.

3.7.4. Strategic orientation of the selling centers

According to Daum, Greif and Przywara (2010), a sales process can be either customer-oriented (CN 421) or goal-oriented (CN 41). According to Menthe and Sieg (2018), this depends on the respective leadership principles of an organization. However, the ideas of managers do not always match the ideas of employees. In this case, conflicts can arise. According to Menthe and Sieg (2018), for example, if leaders are goal-oriented but their employees are customer-oriented, this can lead employees to accuse the company of exploiting its customers. According to Daum, Greif and Przywara (2010), each type of seller prefers either a customer-oriented approach or a goal-oriented approach. However, to reduce potential conflicts, knowledge about the preferences of subgroups within selling centers is useful. In this survey, tendencies of strategic orientation could be observed based on the respective hierarchy level of interview participants. Interview participants at a high

hierarchy level disproportionately mentioned goal orientation. This result regarding the distribution of codes coincides with the findings of a study by Tuzovic (2004). The following hypotheses can be formulated:

$H_{9.1}$: If a selling center is goal-oriented, selling center participants participate voluntarily.

$H_{9.1}$: Goal orientation is more important for selling center participants at high hierarchy levels than for selling center participants at low hierarchy levels as far as their voluntary participation is concerned.

Interview participants at a low hierarchical level, on the other hand, disproportionately mentioned customer orientation. Also, this result coincides with the findings of Tuzovic (2004). The following hypotheses can be formulated.

$H_{10.1}$: If a selling center is customer-oriented, selling center participants participate voluntarily.

$H_{10.2}$: Customer orientation is more important for selling center participants at low hierarchy levels than for selling center participants at high hierarchy levels as far as their voluntary participation is concerned.

This knowledge can be used when managing sales project phases[82] where selling center participants of different hierarchy levels need to be involved. For example, in the phases of product and service conception in which specialists at lower hierarchy levels need to be involved, customer benefits can be emphasized. In final sales project phases characterized by contract negotiations and decisions to be made by managers on high hierarchy levels, the successful closure of the sales project can be emphasized.

3.7.5. Factors on the team level

Before going into the main categories in detail, it can be summarized on a high level that factors at the team level influence both the commitment and mood of the participants involved. According to Troger (2018), the social exchange theory describes that cohesion within a team influences whether its participants are committed to it and also whether they are committed to the respective leader of the

[82] High level sales process structures for selling centers can be found in Hanin (2002) and Lippold (2016).

team. An explanatory approach for the commitment to the leader could be that according to Lübbers (2005), teams expect their leaders to impact their cohesion in a positive way. Furthermore, according to Burba (2018) and Totterdell (1999, as cited in York Urban, 2008, p. 56), the moods of individual project members often impact the common mood of all project members and vice versa. In the following, the individual main categories will be discussed and their ability to be influenced assessed in a next step.

The first main category is *collegiality and affiliation* (CN 51). According to Franken (2007), the sense of belonging to a certain group increases the acceptance of common goals as well as the collective rules of conduct of this group. The common goal of a selling center can, for example, as was shown above, be the satisfaction of the customer or the successful conclusion of a contract. This factor is also under discussion as a driver of team selling effectiveness (Achrol, Scheer & Stern, 1990, as cited in Smith and Barclay, 1997, p. 4). According to Lackner (2012), employees who submit to a higher goal are willing to accept attempts by their leader to influence them. However, one problem fluid teams like selling centers face is that that individuals are uncertain about the contribution their colleagues make to achieving the team goal. The frequency analysis showed that the interview participants of all subgroups mentioned collegiality and affiliation as a factor. The following hypothesis can thus be formulated:

H_{11}: If a selling center team is collegial and selling center participants feel they belong to the team, they participate voluntarily.

The second main category is *motivated colleagues* (CN 521). According to Burn (2010) and Correll (2006), working in a motivated team leads to a transfer of this motivation and an increasing willingness to commit among the individuals involved. This main category was mentioned comparatively rarely and only by women. According to Becker (2019), the social work environment is more important for women than for men. Therefore, a possible explanation approach could be that women are also more sensitive to the level of motivation than their male colleagues. The following two hypotheses can be formulated:

$H_{12.1}$: If a selling center team consists of motivated colleagues, selling center participants participate voluntarily.

$H_{12.2}$: Motivated colleagues are more important for getting female selling center participants to volunteer than for male selling center participants.

The third main category is *stress-resistant colleagues* (CN 531). According to Jakoby (2013), challenging tasks, close cooperation, new problem situations and time pressure often lead to a negative form of stress in projects. According to Braasch (2018), participants within a project team who are already stressed can transfer their stress level to other colleagues involved. According to Braasch (2018), this phenomenon is referred to as stress infection. According to Jakoby (2013), stress can lead to somatic reactions such as changes in blood pressure and diseases, and also to psychological reactions like anger, frustration and depression. Bodenmann and Gmelch (2009) supplement this list with irritability, aggression, egocentricity and controversy. According to Mees, Oefner-Py and Sünnemann (1995), the initial euphoria for a project changing to frustration and a lack of interest in further participation as a result of stress can be observed. This main category was mentioned by one interview participant so that an assumption about distributions between subgroups does not seem appropriate. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{13}: If a selling center team consists of stress-resistant colleagues, the selling center participates voluntarily.

According to Borgert (2013), the design and maintenance of a positive working atmosphere is one of the tasks of a project manager. There are various options available for this. For example, this could include teambuilding measures for the development of interpersonal relationships[83] or performance incentives for increasing motivation. According to Jakoby (2010), however, project-related circumstances like a high stress level cannot be fundamentally avoided. Jakoby (2010) recommends instead assessing potential participants in regard to their stress resistance before involving them in a project team. Also, the motivational directions of selling center participants and the team cohesion should be assessed carefully upfront in order to choose effective measures. In practice, there are various team

[83] For further information, also see Haensel, Baumgaertner, Kornmann and Ennigkeit (2016).

diagnostic instruments available to assess cohesion, motivation or stress resistance.[84] For the main categories mentioned, these can be, for example:

- Collegiality and affiliation (CN 51): Kauffeld's F-A-T questionnaire (2004), which includes a measurement of team cohesion
- Motivated colleagues (CN 521): the Reiss-Motivation Profile by Steven Reiss (2004) for determining the direction of motivation
- Stress-resistant colleagues (CN 531): the resilience scale of Wagnild and Young (1993) for the analysis of stress resistance

3.7.6. Big Five Personality Traits

According to Öchsler and Paul (2009), the Big Five test is the most popular personality test and the foundation of a large number of studies regarding the connection between personality traits and ideal leadership. However, according to Tavares, Sobral, Goldszmidt and Araùjo (2018), when researching implicit leadership prototypes, individual personality traits are not considered, but entire personality profiles. One of the most extensive studies on this subject was carried out in 2002 by Judge, Bono, Illies and Gerhardt. This study examined which personality traits make individuals successful in their role as leaders. According to Neyer and Asendorpf (2018), this meta-study examined 73 independent samples with approximately $N = 40{,}000$ participants. Judge, Bono, Illies and Gerhardt (2002, as cited in Evers, Anderson & Smit-Voskuijil, 2005, p. 183) found that emotional stability (p = .24), extraversion (p = .31), openness to experience (p = .24), conscientiousness (p = 24) and, to a lesser degree, tolerability (p = .08) correlate positively with leadership success. The resulting personality profile also coincides with the results of this study. The individual main categories were chosen by relatively few participants, which is why direct comparisons between subgroups appeared to be inappropriate. Since only one aspect per hypothesis may be taken into account, only hypotheses per personality trait were formulated:

H_{14}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as extraverted, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

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[84] According to Wastian, Braumandl, Rosenstiel and West (2018), team diagnostic instruments are suitable for analyzing the condition of these factors and for controlling the effects of measures taken.

H_{15}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as emotionally stable, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

H_{16}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as conscientious, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

H_{17}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as agreeable, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

H_{18}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as open to experiences, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

These personality traits are stable according to Asendorpf (2011) and cannot be influenced directly. To ensure that project managers of selling centers have these personality profiles, companies would need to already identify these traits during recruitment processes, or before assigning employees as project managers for selling centers. The assessment can be carried out, for example, using a Big Five test.

3.7.7. Intelligence

In qualitative research, intelligence is considered an important characteristic for leaders (Judge, Illies & Colbert, 2004). Intelligence (LR 211) was even empirically identified by Epitropaki and Martin (2005, as cited in Lang & Rybnikova, 2014, p.74) as a key characteristic of leadership prototypes. According to Kanning (2004, as cited in Steiger & Lippmann, 2013, p.203), intelligence attributed such a high weighting that it is even capable of overshadowing other features. However, according to Weber and Rammsayer (2012), the subjective assessment of other people's intelligence is significantly influenced by judgmental distortions that result from an overall impression. In this case, perceived intelligence does not correspond to actual intelligence. Judge, Colbert and Ilies (2004, as cited in Braun, Frey, Nübold & Maier, 2017, p. 549) found in their studies that perceived intelligence (p = .65) instead of actual intelligence (p = .27) has a greater impact on the attribution of leadership roles by other people. According to Sternberg (2001, as cited in Maltby, Day & Macaskill, 2011, p 483), the ideas of intelligence vary according to the country. However, according to Sternberg (1981, as cited in Maltby, Day & Macaskill, 2011, pp. 480-485), it can be roughly said that the cognitive ability to collect, record and sort information quickly and efficiently

is interpreted as intelligent in the western world, while in eastern cultures, the relationship of an individual to other people, along with historical aspects and spirituality also play a role. Intelligence was only mentioned by two participants, which is why it was not considered appropriate to draw conclusions about differences between subgroups. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{19}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as intelligent, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

But how can a project leader influence being perceived as intelligent? According to Schanze (2007), the above-mentioned cognitive abilities, such as sorting information quickly and efficiently, can be improved with training. Thus, perceived intelligence can be considered as influenceable.

3.7.8. Competences and key competences

According to Würzburger (2016), the competences of a project manager relate to their acceptance within the project team. However, this is not about filling these competences at the highest possible level. According to Haunerdinger and Probst (2012), the required competences should be available at an adequate level to successfully manage a project. The impact of the individual main categories on a project are discussed below. The next step will deal with their influenceability.

The first main category is *conceptional-analytical competence* (LR 31). Katz (1955, as cited in Krispel, 2017, pp. 17-18) describes conceptual-analytical competence as a required core competence of a leader in order to recognize wishes, needs and relationships within an organization. According to Freyer (2008), this competence also enables leaders to make conceptual-strategic decisions. Conceptual-analytical competence was mentioned by interview participants from all subgroups. Striking differences between subgroups could not be identified. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{20}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as conceptual-analytical, competent selling center participants will accept that project manager as leader.

The second main category is *social-communicative competence* (LR 32). According to Henn (2012, as cited in Fischer, 2014, p. 9), social-communicative competence is the most important competence of a leader and ensures trust and

partnership with their employees.[85] According to a survey by diepresse.com (2013, as cited in Krispel, 2017, p. 9), it is considered a characteristic of an ideal manager. Social-communicative competence was important to interview participants from all subgroups, which is why no differences between groups were recognized. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{21}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as social-communicative, competent selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

The third main category is *technical-methodical competence* (LR 33). Katz (1955, as cited in Krispel, 2017, pp. 17-18) and Winkler, Dörr and Klebl (2017) describe conceptual-analytical competence as another required core competence of a leader. According to Krispel (2017), leaders with technical and methodical competence can instruct, train and evaluate their employees. According to Winkler, Dörr and Klebl (2017), technical-methodical competence is also necessary for leaders in order to act as problem-solvers and to make future-oriented decisions. Like the previous main category, technical-methodical competence was important in interviewing participants from all subgroups. Therefore no differences could be assumed. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{22}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as technical-methodical, competent selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

The fourth main category is *conveyance competence* (LR 341). According to Granahl (2014), conveyance competence is an essential skill for leaders in order to be able to meet their employees professionally at eye level. Leaders who lack conveyance competence also have difficulties conveying their visions and plans to their team. According to Onaran (2019), they have a high probability of failing in their leadership role. Conveyance competence was only mentioned by two participants. Based on this data, conclusions about differences in subgroups did not appear to be appropriate. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{23}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as conveyance competent, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

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[85] Both trust (Caldarola, 2011; Smith & Barclay, 1993) and partnership (Kothandaram, Agnihotri & Dingus, 2014) are positively discussed in the selling center literature in connection with cultivating internal relationships.

The fifth main category is *error competence and ability to deal with criticism* (LR 35). The way that leaders deal with errors, according to Heimsöth (2017), shapes their relationships with their employees and can either lead to trust or to anger and disappointment. Dealing with criticism received from employees also influences these relationships and whether an acceptance of leadership arises. According to Stolze (2019), admitting mistakes, for example, has a positive impact on the reputation of leaders among their employees. According to Hinterhuber and Erdmüller (2000), dealing with errors that have occurred is a crucial aspect for the perceived credibility of a manager. Error competence and ability to deal with criticism were only mentioned by interview participants at low hierarchical levels. In particular, they generated codes for the subcategory *Openness in dealing with their own mistakes and deficits* (LR 351). One way to explain this distribution is that errors toward selling center participants at high hierarchy levels are more difficult to conceal due to their participation in project committees or key deal reviews than toward selling center participants at low hierarchy levels. The following hypotheses can be formulated:

$H_{24.1}$: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as error competent and has an ability to deal with criticism, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

$H_{24.2}$: The presence of error competence and the ability to deal with the criticism of a project manager is more important to selling center participants at a low hierarchy level than to selling center participants at a high hierarchy level in accepting that project manager as a leader.

The sixth main category is management competence (LR 36). According to Schoppen and Kesper (2011), management competence is the basis for planning, control, organization and leadership tasks within organizations. Management competence, in addition to technical competence according to Hirzel (1984), form the basis of whether a leader is perceived as efficient. Interview participants from all management competences were mentioned, which is why it was not considered appropriate to draw conclusions about differences in subgroups. The following hypothesis was formulated:

H_{25}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as having management competence, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

According to Weinert (2001, as cited in Jurkowski, 2011, p. 8) competences are learnable and thus influenceable skills. Project management literature presents various ways to develop competences. Löbe and Severing (2011), for example, suggest implementing a competence management department. Wastian, Braumandl and von Rosenstiel (2012) present the implementation of project manager coaching as an alternative approach.

3.7.9. Experience

If a leader is considered confident, it depends on their perceived experience (Ghimire, 2019). According to Ayberk, Kratzer and Linke (2017), experience in the leadership context means dealing with complex situations, keeping calm and keeping track of stressful situations as well as dealing with certain technologies. According to Rademacher (2014), employees associate the term experience with wisdom, which according to Baltes and Smith (1990, as cited in Rademacher, 2014, p. 196) represents a form of expert knowledge in the professional context. According to Bradford, Brown, Ganesan, Hunter, Onyemah, Palmatier, Rouziès, Spiro, Sujan and Weitz (2010), availability of expert knowledge is also a prerequisite to identifying the right internal specialists for a selling center. According to Koch and Strasser (2008, as cited in Melzer, Heim, Sanders & Bullinger-Hoffmann, 2019, p. 18), experience in a professional context can also be considered as the existence of relevant competences. If leaders are not perceived as experienced (LR 4), this, according to Rademacher (2014), causes a lack of trust and leads to resistance.[86] Experience was mentioned by participants from all subgroups so that no assumptions about differences were made. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{26}: If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as experienced, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.

Since experience in the professional context describes the existence of competences, this can be influenced as explained above.

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[86] As shown in the chapter *Acceptance matrix* by *Seidel and Bleicher*, resistance is the opposite of acceptance.

3.7.10. Personal Attitudes

According to Posselt (2014), it can be observed that the relevance of attitudes by leaders is becoming increasingly important for employees. Especially with regard to prototypical leadership, Krummaker and Vogel (2011) mention the relevance of attitudes. In the following, the respective main categories of this category cluster will be discussed. Afterwards, the possibility of influencing them will be discussed.

The first main category is *self-confidence* (LR 511). Self-confidence, according to Ahrens and Ahrens (2014), is among the essential characteristics of a highly developed individual. According to Ahrens and Ahrens (2014), this attitude helps to meet the increasing demands on human size. According to Katzengruber (2010), self-confidence is one of the most striking features that leaders have in common. Confidence thus is an attitude that indicates leadership qualities. Confidence was only mentioned by one interview participant. It is therefore not considered appropriate to draw any conclusions about group differences. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{27}: *If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as self-confident, competent selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

The second main category is *willingness to take risks* (LR 521). According to Breckwoldt (2013), willingness to take risks combined with the ability to handle them is an important prerequisite for the development and excellence of an individual. According to Stolz (2019), willingness to take risks is one of the characteristics of a modern and visionary leader. If a leader is willing to take risks, according to Weibler (2001, as cited in Aretz, 2007, p. 21), this can lead to being perceived as charismatic. Willingness to take risks was only mentioned by one interview participant. It is therefore not considered appropriate to draw any conclusions about group differences. The following hypothesis can be formulated.

H_{28}: *If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as willing to take risks, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

The third main category is *willingness to take responsibility* (LR 521). Willingness to take responsibility is a characteristic of ideal leadership according to Seel and Hanke (2015). According to Aron-Weidlich (2012), if a leader is not willing to take responsibility, this can lead to an organization splitting employees

and leaders into two conflicting parts. In this case, according to Aaron-Weidlich (2012), employees will refuse to accept any consequences of decisions from their leader. Like the main category above, willingness to take responsibility was only mentioned by one interview participant, which is why no conclusions about subsamples have been drawn. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{29}: *If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as willing to take responsibility, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

The fourth main category is *engagement and self-initiative* (LR 54). If a leader is engaged and shows initiative, according to Simsbrunner (2019), this also increases the willingness of employees to get involved. However, according to Simsbrunner (2019), if there is a lack of commitment and initiative by a leader, this also causes the commitment of the employees to decrease. At least half of the participants of all subgroups expressed willingness to take responsibility. Differences between the subgroups could therefore not be assumed in this database. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{30}: *If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as engaged and having initiative, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

The fifth main category is *ethical values* (LR 55). According to Scholz (2014, as cited in Straubhaar & Schellinger, 2019, p.20), leaders who are perceived as ethically correct are considered as prototypes of ideal leadership that employees like to follow. Ethical values were important to participants in all subgroups, which is why no differences between these subgroups were assumed. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{31}: *If a project manager of a selling center has ethical values, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

The sixth main category is *collegiality* (LR 56). Collegiality has several positive effects on the relationship between a leader and employees. If a leader behaves collegially, according to Wiedemann (2015), this shows respect for human dignity and humanity. According to Koschmider and Sauer (2014), collegiality is also considered as characteristic of good leadership. Another effect of collegiality, according to Cosner (2010), is the emergence of trust in a leader among employees. Collegiality was mentioned by at least half of the participants in all subgroups. It can therefore be assumed that collegiality is important for selling center

participants regardless of the affiliation to one of these subgroups. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{32}: *If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as collegial, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

The seventh main category is *congruence* (LR 57). Congruence with regard to generating acceptance of leadership and increasing leadership effectiveness is positively mentioned in Marquis and Huston (2009) and Gupta (2004). According to Wüst and Kreutzer (2012), leaders who are congruent enjoy a positive reputation within a company. According to Göpfert (2019), congruence is a necessary prerequisite for a leader to inspire and enthrall employees. Congruence was only mentioned by one interview participant, which is why no conclusions about subsamples have been drawn. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H_{33}: *If a project manager of a selling center is perceived as congruent, selling center participants will accept that project manager as a leader.*

Based on Bornewasser (1979, as cited in Barry, 2014, p. 49), attitudes are acquired within socialization while dealing with the environment. According to Trommsdorf (2019), attitudes can be influenced by individuals through learning processes. This makes it possible to actively influence attitudes, for example, through coaching, feedback discussions or studying literature.

3.7.11. Accurate and clear work instructions

Accurate and clear work instructions were also mentioned in an exploratory study by Aretz (2019) as a characteristic of successful leadership behavior. These are a feature of ideal leadership according to Stöwe and Beenen (2013). If no clear work instructions are given, according to Eickenberg (2006) and von der Linde and von der Heyde (2007), this leads to ambiguity and can result in a defensive posture among employees. Accurate and clear work instructions were mentioned by 92% of all interview participants. Assumptions about differences between the subgroups were therefore considered to be inappropriate. The following hypothesis can be formulated.

H_{34}: If work instructions are accurate and clear, they are accepted by selling center participants.

The formulation of work instructions can be fully influenced by the project manager of a selling center. In order to do so, Syring (2017) proposes giving as few tasks as possible per work instruction, and prioritizing them clearly and avoiding any type of misinterpretation.

3.7.12. Leadership style

When analyzing the main categories of this category cluster, various preferences regarding leadership styles can be identified. This result coincides with the findings of Lindinger and Zeisel (2013), who reject the existence of a generally accepted leadership style and suggest the adaptation of different leadership styles depending on demands and situations. At the subcategory level, some mentions seem to be in conflict with each other: for example, the involvement of selling center participants in decision making processes was mentioned, but also the enforcement of decisions by the project manager. Even if these characteristics of authoritarian leadership (LS 12) and participatory leadership (LS 13) seem to contradict each other, according to Polzin and Weigl (2009), they can be combined into a situational leadership style (LS 11). According to Stöhler (2016), this leadership style is even typical of projects to meet participants at their respective level of development. Transferred to a selling center, this can be illustrated using two different project phases:

- If a product or service is adapted based on customer requirements, experts can be more closely involved in the design through a participatory leadership style.
- If the customer is faced with a decision but needs a discount due to their available budget, an authoritarian leadership style can avoid time-consuming discussions with financial managers involved.

The results showed some differences between the subgroups. Female interview participants, for example, preferred a participatory leadership style. This coincides with the findings of Northouse (2010) and Hernandez Bark, van Quaquebeke and van Dick (2017), according to which participatory leadership is more in line with the idea of a leadership style from a female perspective. The following hypotheses can be formulated:

$H_{36.1}$: If a project manager of selling center has a participatory leadership style, that project manager will be accepted as a leader by the selling center participants.

$H_{36.2}$: A participatory leadership style is more important to male selling center participants than to female selling center participants in accepting the project manager as a leader.

Male interview participants preferred a situational leadership style. This also coincides with the findings of Northouse (2010) and Hernandez Bark, van Quaquebeke and van Dick (2017), according to whom authoritarian leadership goes hand in hand with the ideas of leadership from a male perspective. The following hypotheses can be formulated:

$H_{36.1}$: *$H_{36.1}$: If a project manager of selling center has an authoritarian leadership style, that project manager is accepted as a leader by the selling center participants.*

$H_{36.2}$: An *authoritarian leadership style is more important to male selling center participants than to female selling center participants in order to accept the project manager as a leader.*

A situational leadership style was particularly important to male interview participants. This result coincides with the study[87] by Kaifi, Noor, Nguyen, Aslami, and Khanfar (2014) in which it was demonstrated that situational leadership styles correspond more to the tendencies of male individuals. The following hypotheses can be formulated:

$H_{37.1}$: *$H_{36.1}$: If a project manager of selling center has a situational leadership style, that project manager is accepted as a leader by the selling center participants.*

$H_{37.2}$: A *situational leadership style is more important to male selling center participants than to female selling center participants in accepting the project manager as a leader.*

Furthermore, the interview participants mentioned a charismatic leadership style (LS 14). According to Hornstein (2009) and Siebert (2006), charismatic leadership is often associated with crises and unstructured situations in which desires for a charismatic leader emerge. According to Weibler (2012), charismatic leaders are unconditionally accepted in such times, particularly by individuals with

[87] In this study, n = 100 female and n = 100 male students with relevant work experience were interviewed.

a low level of self-confidence.[88] The mention of a charismatic leadership style was rather homogeneous between the subgroups of the interview participants. Based on these results, the formulation of assumptions about differences between the subgroups did not seem appropriate. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

H38: *H36.1: If a project manager of selling center has a charismatic leadership style, that project manager is accepted as a leader by the selling center participants.*

The authoritarian, situational and participatory leadership style can be influenced directly by a project manager. The charismatic leadership style can only be influenced in part. According to Stock-Homburg (2010), the charismatic leadership style emerges from an interplay of modifiable behaviors as well as stable personality traits.

[88] According to Weibler (2012), some authors object that individuals with a high degree of self-confidence often seem to be resistant to a charismatic leadership style even in times of crisis.

4. QUANTITATIVE STUDY

According to Tausendpfund (2018), qualitative research can be used to indicate the probability of rules based on repeated observations of individual cases. However, according to Tausendpfund (2018), qualitative research is not being able to conclusively prove these rules. According to Klapper, Konradt, Walter and Wolf (2007), qualitative research therefore tries to generate enough depth of understanding for complex real phenomena to derive hypotheses. According to Strauss (2004), these hypotheses are the link between qualitative research and quantitative research. A quantitative part within a mixed method design[89] like this, according to Tausendpfund (2018) and Kuckartz (2014), serves the purpose of generalizing these results and obtaining more exact numbers of discovered differences.

4.1. STUDY DESIGN

The quantitative part of this study was carried out using a questionnaire survey. This form of data collection is one of the most frequently used instruments in empirical social research according to Pallas (2006, as cited in Frittum, 2009, p. 75). According to Blum (1988), questionnaires have the advantage of anonymity, exclusion of manipulations by the researcher, collection of quantities and the possibility of well-thought-out information by the survey participants. Prenner (2016) also mentions a high degree of standardization, practicability and the simultaneous efficient collection of large amounts of data.

The foundation of quantitative research methods like questionnaire surveys are according to Weber (2017) hypotheses. In case of a questionnaire conception, according to Schäfer (2016), this means that one or more questionnaire items need to be formulated for each hypothesis. Ideally, the questionnaire items would map all thirty-eight hypotheses from the qualitative survey. However, there are

[89] According to Baur and Blasius (2019), if a study consists of a qualitative part in which hypotheses are generated and a quantitative part in which these hypotheses are tested, this is called a *sequential qualitative-quantitative mixed method design*.

limitations depending on the number of questionnaire items that need to be discussed. According to Hampton and Wellmann (1999, as cited in Lütters, 2004, p.167), the main problem questionnaire surveys face is a high drop-out rate. According to Lozar Manfreda and Vehovar (2001, as cited in Lütters, 2004, p. 167), a typical reason for this is the length of the questionnaire and the decreasing interest of the questionnaire participants. According to Birnkraut (2011) and Pfleiderer (2001), the length of a questionnaire should take a maximum of ten minutes to limit the risk of dropouts. This has an impact on the number of hypotheses that can be tested in a questionnaire survey. Therefore, a selection of hypotheses was tested. In total, there were two possible approaches identified to prioritize hypotheses for the quantitative part of this study.

The first possible approach was to select hypotheses that relate to differences between genders or hierarchy levels. The advantage of this approach with regard to the second research question lies in the justified probability of identifying differences between these subgroups. The disadvantages of this approach include the poor coverage of different category clusters and the fact that main categories are taken into account with relatively little mention in the qualitative study.

Brosius, Haas and Koschel (2016) suggest investigating phenomena with quantitative methods to look at them broadly rather than in depth. The second possible approach, therefore, was to select the hypotheses that refer to the main categories with the most mentions per category cluster. This approach is in line with Bos (1998) and Heinrich (2017), which assume that the frequency of mention of a term during qualitative interviews correlates with its importance and significance. The advantages of this approach are therefore to examine what are likely to be the most important hypotheses per category cluster and to take into account all of the different types of factors identified when answering research question 2.

Due to the advantages, the second approach was used. Thus, the following fourteen hypotheses were selected for testing in the quantitative part of this study: H_1, H_2, H_8, $H_{9.1}$, $H_{9.2}$, H_{11}, H_{14}, H_{19}, H_{21}, H_{26}, H_{32}, H_{34}, $H_{35.1}$ and $H_{35.2}$.

4.1.1. Conception of the questionnaire

According to Kirchhoff, Kuhnt, Lipp and Schlawin (2008), there is no universal standard for the design of a questionnaire. According to Bode (2009), for this reason, the researchers' care must ensure that the development of their questionnaires can be understood intersubjectively. Ensuring traceability is the task of this chapter. This is a questionnaire developed from a social science perspective. According to Raab-Steiner (2015), socio-scientific questionnaires are created to collect opinions, attitudes and positions from survey participants. According to Pelka (2003), a special feature of social science questionnaires is the consideration of a high response rate during their conception. The original German language version and the translated version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix I. The questionnaire consists of the following six sections:

- questionnaire title
- thanks for participation and instructions
- input mask for the test-retest code
- main part
- demographic questions
- adoption

The first part of the questionnaire is its title. According to Schöneck and Voß (2005), the availability of a questionnaire title has a positive impact on the participation rate. However, the title must therefore meet certain requirements. According to Porst (2014), a questionnaire title should be interesting and appealing to the target group, need to be as simple and understandable as possible, and should mention the content of the survey without generating false expectations. One lesson learned from the qualitative survey was that interview participants were better able to classify the synonymous term sales project team, than the term selling center. Taking into account the characteristics proposed by Porst and these lessons learned, the following title was chosen for the questionnaire: *Leadership in interdisciplinary sales project teams - Under which conditions does it find acceptance*?[90]

[90] This is a translation of the original German title.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of thanks for participation and questionnaire instructions.[91] The instructions started by explaining that the survey examines how the acceptance of leadership in selling centers arises. A definition of the term *selling center* followed.[92] The participants were informed that the main part of the questionnaire consists of different topics and that demographic data will be collected at the end of the questionnaire. As suggested by Mummendey and Grau (2014), the participants were asked to read all questions carefully, answer questions in turn, and respond honestly and quickly. It was also pointed out that participation in this survey is important for this research work.[93] A note about the anonymity of the survey followed. The contact details of the test leader were listed at the end of the introduction for potential questions.[94]

The third part offered an input mask for a six-digit test-retest code. This code was provided by the researcher for the event that survey participants expressed an interest in participating at the test-retest procedure. The code was used to identify and match both questionnaires of the same participant. The sub-chapter *Pretests* will discuss the test-retest procedure in more detail. Participation was optional and this page was allowed to be skipped by the survey participants.

The fourth part was the main part of the questionnaire consisting of the questionnaire items. All questionnaire items and response scales followed a uniform design, which according to Wagner (2019) is more pleasant for survey participants. The chapter *Construction of questionnaire items* will discuss each questionnaire item in detail. Only closed questions were used for the questionnaire. According to Porst (2014), this format has a positive influence on the processing time of the questionnaire. Further advantages of closed questions include,

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[91] Raab-Steiner (2015) recommend designing the first pag of a questionnaire this way.

[92] Instructions according to Porst (2014) should include an explanation of technical terms like selling center.

[93] According to Porst (2016), this can have a motivating effect on survey participants and thus increase the participation-rate.

[94] According to Porst (2014), providing contact details can decrease dropout due to the ambiguity of questions that could be discussed in a dialogue with the between test leader.

according to Möhring and Schlütz (2010), higher reliability, higher validity, and more comparability than open questions. Closed questions, according to Ebster and Stalzer (2017), are largely independent of the language level of a survey participant. All questions had to be answered in order to continue within the questionnaire. The questionnaire items were each formulated as statements. According to Bortz and Döring (1995), statements are the recommend form of questionnaire items for the investigation of positions, opinions and attitudes. According to Weiber and Jacob (2000), the use of statements also expands the perceived response scope for survey participants. For this questionnaire, five-step response scales were used that, according to Porst (2014), were characterized by an even lower risk of intellectual overload than seven-step response scales.[95] Only the end points of the scales were named. Thus, according to Bold and Reiners (2011), an interval-scale level is reached, since inadequate verbalizations are excluded.[96] According to Porst (2014), the scales were positively polarized from right to left in an ascending and positive manner, as this harmonizes most closely with the cognitive processing of European cultures. A mix of positive and negative response scales should be avoided, as according to Bühner (2011), aggregated values could be distorted, validity could be adversely affected, and the demand for verbal intelligence may increase. The endpoints of the scales were named as recommended by Porst and Jerst (2007, as cited in Porst, 2014, p. 92) in *I do not agree at all* and *I completely agree*. Forcing responses was avoided by implementing an evasive category.[97] This evasive category was called *I cannot rate that*.

The fifth part of the questionnaire collected the demographic data. The placement of demographic questions at the end of a questionnaire was recommend by Hollenberg (2016). To collect demographic data, the *explicit core variables* of

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[95] According to Porst (2014), five-step to seven-step response scales have proven to be effective, which remain constant over the questionnaire.

[96] According to Schaefer (2016), interval scale level is desirable in quantitative research since it makes statistical parameters calculable and interpretable.

[97] According to Porst (2014), an evasive category can sometimes help to avoid respondents always choosing the answer in the middle in the event of indecision or a lack of understanding of a questionnaire item. According to Stier (1996), this non-forced rating has a positive impact on data quality.

Eurostat were used, which are available in the demographic standards offered by the German Federal Statistical Office. According to the German Federal Statistical Office (2010), demographic standards make it possible to standardize socio-structural survey features, which leads to better comparability with other surveys within European countries. In order to enable comparability between the defined subgroups, a further demographic question about the respective hierarchy level was added. To make the answer category as simple as possible, survey participants could choose between the top half of the hierarchy, the bottom half of the hierarchy, or the middle of the hierarchy. Since only different gender and different hierarchy levels are considered as subgroups in this study, for all other demographic questions, the evasive category *I do not want to specify* was offered along with the option to skip them completely.

The sixth part of the questionnaire was the farewell to the survey participants. As recommended by Mummendey and Grau (2014), this part also included a thank you for their participation and a request for further comments. A free text field was provided for this purpose. According to Mummendey and Grau (2014), this free-text field at the end of a questionnaire can often lead to additional usable and honest output from survey participants.

4.1.1.1. Item construction

The complexity of an item design and its validation depends in particular on which measurement model was used. Both single-item measurement models and multi-item measurement models were used in this questionnaire. The decision as to which measurement model to use was made in a rule-based manner for each questionnaire item. There were two characteristics listed in the literature as prerequisites for single-item measurement models.

- According to Krol (2010), the variable to be measured must be observable.
- According to Obermaier (2009) and Weiber and Mühlhaus (2014), the entirety of the variable to be measured must be reflectable in a single questionnaire item.[98]

[98] According to Obermaier (2009) and Weiber and Muehlhaus (2014), these are so-called global questionnaire items.

According to Hoberg (2020) and Hickel (2011), the advantage of single-item measurement models is a reduction in the length of the questionnaire. According to Hoberg (2020) and Wittko (2012), if single-item measurement models are used without fulfilling the requirements described above, this has a negative impact on the accuracy of measurements.[99] Thus, if questionnaire items are neither observable nor reflectable in a single questionnaire item, a multi-item measurement model must be used according to Six (2012), Walter (2015) and Schäfer (2016). These multi-item measurement models have to be differentiated into reflective or formative measurement models.[100] This classification is necessary because different approaches for testing the quality criteria are proposed in the literature for each measurement model. According to Eberl (2004) and Sammerl (2006), reflective measurement models are used when latent constructs are expressed by causing manifest variables. The focus is on the latent construct. According to Döring and Bortz (2016), the focus in a formative measurement model is on latent variables that are generated by a manifest construct. According to Stolper (2007), formative measurement models are used comparatively rarely in management literature. In summary, the measurement models according to Stolper (2007) differ in the direction of causality between construct and indicators. Figure 19 shows the difference visually.

[99] According to Hoberg (2020), the accuracy of single-item measurement models in the literature is discussed controversially. However, if according to Wittko (2020), single-item measurement models are used to measure concrete constructs with a specific scope, they have a validity comparable to that of multi-item measurement models.

[100] Unlike multi-item measurement models, single-item measurement models, according to Fassot (2006, as cited in Vollhardt, 2007, p. 116), do not need to be differentiated into reflective or formative measurement models.

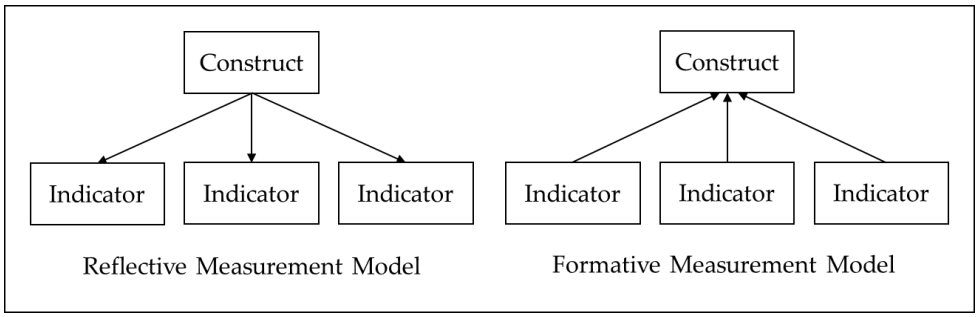

Figure 19. Reflective and formative measurement models. Source: author's representation based on Six (2012).

Reflective measurement models were used to operationalize the main categories from the qualitative survey, as the constructs to be measured were already known. The individual questionnaire items are discussed below. All questionnaire items were translated from an original German version, so there may be some distortions. For each statement, the respective variable identification code is provided in brackets for traceability within the questionnaire.

The first construct is *performance incentives* (CN 1). The operationalization of this was carried out using a single-item measurement model. The literature cites a variety of different performance incentives. In Waldsack (2003), there are already nineteen different examples of performance incentives. Additionally, performance incentives of the same class can also have different gradations. Bellone and Matla (2012) exemplify this by means of a company car that is offered to an employee: a company car can already be regarded as a performance incentive, but the possibility of a newer and larger company car can in turn be a further performance incentive. An illustration of all incentives that are possible would go beyond the scope of the questionnaire. For this reason, performance incentives in line with the definition of Klages (1997, as cited in Busse, 2012, p. 19) were defined as all measures that are supposed to effect motivation-oriented behavior. From the perspective of an employee, a performance incentive therefore means that it will reward their efforts in some way. The following statement could be formulated in order to test hypothesis H_1:

- I voluntarily participate as a member within a selling center if the participation pays off in some way for me (AF02_01).

The second construct is *project transparency* (CN 21). The operationalization of this construct was also carried out using a single-item measurement model. Project transparency means, according to Cholin and Kraus (2018), that all relevant information regarding a project is available for the participants involved. The following statement was formulated in order to test hypothesis H_2:

- I voluntarily participate as a member of a selling center if the selling center team has all relevant information regarding the sales project. (AF03_01).

The third construct is *resources* (CN 3). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item measurement model. According to Geiger, Romano, Gubelmann, Badetscher and Pfiko (2006), resources in the project management context comprise people, materials, equipment, IT systems, knowledge and funds. In the literature, there are no concrete references to materials or equipment that could play a role in the sales project. Therefore, these were not considered as indicators to measure this construct. However, as identified within the qualitative survey, specialists, IT systems, knowledge and funds play a role as resources for selling center participants. The following statements were formulated in order to test Hypothesis H_8.

- I will voluntarily participate as a member of a selling center if the professionals required for the particular sales project also participate (AF04_01).
- I will voluntarily participate as a member of a selling center if the IT systems required for the respective sales project are available (AF04_02).
- I will voluntarily participate as a member of a selling center if the knowledge required for the respective sales project is available (AF04_03).
- I will voluntarily participate as a member of a selling center if the funds required for the respective sales project are available (AF04_04).

The fourth construct is *goal orientation* (CN 41). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a single-item measurement model. According to Bohinc (2012), goal orientation in a project management context means that participants involved orient their actions toward achieving the goal of the

respective project. The following statement was formulated in order to test hypothesis $H_{9.1}$ and hypothesis $H_{9.2}$:

- I will voluntarily participate as a member of a selling center if the selling center team acts in a way that ensures the sales project can be completed successfully (AF05_01).

The fifth construct is *collegiality and affiliation* (CN 51). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item measurement model. According to Geraminis and Hutmacher (2018), collegiality and affiliation on the team level means that individuals within this team can rely on each other, that problems and technical issues can be discussed openly, and that there is an open exchange of information and knowledge sharing. The following statements were formulated in order to test Hypothesis H_{11}:

- I voluntarily participate as a member within a selling center if I can rely on the other participants of the selling center (AF06_01).
- I voluntarily participate as a member within a selling center when I can discuss issues openly with the participants of the selling center (AF06_02).
- I voluntarily participate as a member within a selling center if I can discuss technical issues openly with the participants of the selling center (AF06_03).
- I voluntarily participate as a member within a selling center when the participants of the selling center support each other through information and knowledge exchange (AF06_04).

The sixth construct is *extraversion* (LR 11). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item measurement model. Zimbardo (1983) describes people with the characteristic of extraversion as sociable, outgoing, active, impulsive, and hard-headed. However, some of these terms are either ambiguous or even negatively associated within German-speaking countries. This is why synonyms were used in order to replace these terms. In order to avoid ambiguity, the term *outgoing*, based on the Duden (2018), has been replaced by the synonym *uninhibited*. In line with the Duden (2016), the word *active* has been replaced by the synonym *eager* for better comprehensibility. Due to its negative connotation in German-speaking countries, the word *impulsive* was replaced by the

synonym *spontaneous*, based on Duden (2016). Furthermore, the term *hard-headed* was in line with Iglhaut (2008) and replaced by the synonym *resilient*. The following statements were formulated to in order to test hypothesis H_{15}:

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader when they are sociable (AF08_01).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are not inhibited in the presence of others (AF08_02).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader when they are eager (AF08_03).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader when they act spontaneously (AF08_04).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are resilient (AF08_05).

The seventh construct is *intelligence* (LR 2). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item measurement model. While among the psychology experts according to Khan (2018) and Fliaster (2007) there is disagreement regarding the concept of intelligence, lay people have clear ideas about what they understand by intelligence. The area that researches these ideas is known as the *implicit theories of intelligence*. According to Yang and Sternberg (1997, as cited in Maltby, Day & Macaskill, 2011, pp. 480f.), Implicit theories of intelligence explain the definition of intelligence by lay people while also considering different cultures. Yang and Sternberg (1997, as cited in Maltby, Day & Macaskill, 2011, p. 483) found that intelligence in Germany is described by lay people through performance, reason, memory, and self-determination. Since the term reason is a latent construct for which different ideas can exist, further research has been carried out to find an adequate synonym. Based on Duden (2018), reason means showing understanding, recognizing connections, overlooking and classifying situations in a meaningful way, recognizing the rankings of given values and directing actions toward them. The following statements were formulated in order to test hypothesis H_{19}:

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader when they are productive (AF09_01).

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they show understanding (AF09_02).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to recognize connections (AF09_03).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to overlook situations (AF09_04).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to classify situations in a meaningful way (AF09_05).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they have the ability to prioritize (AF09_06).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader when they prioritize things by their importance (AF09_07).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they have a good memory (AF09_08).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they do not make their actions dependent on others (AF09_09).

The eighth construct is *social-communicative competence* (LR 321). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item measurement model. According to Erpenbeck (2010), social-communicative competence is summarized by the property words *ability to communicate*, *ability to cooperate*, and *adaptability and relationship management*, which can each be transformed into action-related property words. However, some of these terms had to be refined to avoid ambiguity. According to Bold and Reiners (2011), communication means that an individual is eloquent and able to convince others. According to Lang (2009), adaptability in relationship to social competence means that an individual is able to adapt to their environment. According to Lang (2009), the term environment refers in particular to other people. The term relationship management was described as initiation and maintenance of relationships with other people, in line with Thieme (2017). The following were formulated in order to test hypothesis H_{21}:

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are eloquent (AF10_06).

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to convince others (AF10_01).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to cooperate (AF10_02).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to adapt their behavior to the people they are dealing with (AF10_03).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to build new relationships with other people (AF10_04).
- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they are able to nurture existing relationships with other people (AF10_05).

The ninth construct is *experience* (LR 4). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item measurement model. According to Fischer (2007), experience can be divided into the three sub-areas life experience, everyday experience and work experience. According to Fischer (2007), everyday experience is a particular sub-form of life experience, which is expressed through the routine an individual uses to master everyday situations. The following three statements were formulated in order to test hypothesis H_{26}:

- Whether I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader depends on the amount of their life experience (AF11_01).
- Whether I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader depends on the amount of their work experience (AF11_02).
- Whether I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader depends on how routinely they deal with everyday situations (AF11_03).

The tenth construct is *collegiality* (LR 56). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a single-item measurement model. According to Duden (2019), collegiality is a synonym for partnership. According to Iglhaut (2008), partnership can be further defined as the equal treatment of individuals. The following statement was formulated to test hypothesis H_{32}:

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader when they meet the participants of the selling center on an equal footing (AF12_02).

The eleventh construct is *accurate and clear work instructions* (LR 56). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a multi-item

measurement model. According to Janson (2007), an assigned task is considered exact and clearly understandable when a precise task description is given, a deadline has been defined for the task, a justification about the meaning and purpose of the task is known, and a definition of the quality claim is available. The following statements were formulated in order to test hypothesis H_{34}:

- In order for me to voluntarily follow the instructions of a selling center's project manager, they have to contain all of the details that are necessary for me (AF13_01).
- In order for me to voluntarily follow the instructions of a selling center's project manager, I need to know the reason for this work instruction (AF13_02).
- In order for me to voluntarily follow the instructions of the selling center's project manager, I need to know how much time I've been given for the task´s execution (AF13_03).
- In order for me to voluntarily follow the instructions of the selling center's project manager, I have to know how much care I need to use to carry it out (AF13_04).

The twelfth construct is *participatory leadership* (LS 56). The operationalization of this construct was carried out using a single-item measurement model. Raich (2005) defines participatory leadership as involving employees in decision-making processes. In order to test hypothesis $H_{35.1}$ and hypothesis $H_{35.2}$, the following statement was formulated.

- I accept the project manager of a selling center as a leader if they take my opinion into account in their decision-making process (AF07_01).

4.1.2 Pretests

According to Bortz and Döring (2002, cited in Graf, 2008, p. 150), pretests are an integral part of social science studies. Development pretests were used during questionnaire development and the final finishing pretests before the questionnaire was used in the field.[101] Two questionnaire checklists, a cognitive pretest and a

[101] According to Werner (2004), development pretests are pretests that are used during the gradual development of a questionnaire. According to Weis (2006), on

classic pretest were used as development pretests. As a final finishing pretest, an expert discussion and a technical functionality test were carried out. All pretests and checklists are documented in Appendix J.

The first checklist that was used as a development assessment is the Questionnaire Appraisal System (QAS-99). This checklist was developed and provided by the Department of Health and Human Services of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This checklist can be used to check individual questionnaire items. Each of the forty statements developed was checked with this checklist. The Questionnaire Appraisal System consists of twenty-seven evaluation questions that are clustered in the following eight evaluation areas.

- Reading comprehension of the questions
- Clarity of the question instructions
- Clarity of the questions
- Problems that may arise from assumptions
- Possible dependence on the memory of the participants
- Distortions and sensitivity of the questions
- Question answer categories
- Other possible problems

The second checklist is provided by Berger-Grabner (2016) and refers to the questionnaire's structure, completeness, length, instructions and variety. This checklist consists of thirteen questions.

A sorting procedure was carried out as a cognitive pretest. According to Porst (2009), sorting is a form of factor analysis that checks the extent to which an indicator can be assigned to a construct. Sorting according to Schilke (2007) also tests the understanding and clarity of indicators for survey participants. According to Porst (2009), the low database required for this form of factor analysis is a particular advantage of this method. $N = 12$ participants took part in this pretest.[102] The participants took part separately from each other. For the sorting procedure,

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the other hand, final finishing pretests are carried out before the questionnaire is used and only few or no necessary changes are expected.

[102] According to Sparkmann and Wilcox (1982), between 12 and 30 participants are recommended for a cognitive pretest.

the statements formulated from the questionnaire items were put on index cards. The participants had to assign these index cards to the twelve possible correct constructs, which were also written on index cards. In line with the recommendation by Agarwal (2011), an evasive category was also offered as a thirteenth index card. The results were interpreted based on two key figures: the hit rate and the substantive validity coefficient (c_{sv}). The hit rate was calculated from the proportion of correctly assigned indicators per participant. According to Agarwal (2011), a hit rate >90% is considered acceptable. The hit rates of the sorting pretest ranged from 93.75% - 100.00% per participant. The mean was 98.28%. Figure 20 shows the results.

	Actual Category														
Target Catgory	CN 1	CN 21	CN 3	CN 41	CN 51	LS 13	LR 11	LR 2	LR 32	LR 4	LR 56	IN 1	Other	Total	Hit Rate (%)
CN 1	12													12	100.00%
CN 21		12												12	100.00%
CN 3			48											48	100.00%
CN 41				12										12	100.00%
CN 51		2			46									48	95.83%
LS 13						12								12	100.00%
LR 11							60							60	100.00%
LR 2								105	1		1		1	108	97.22%
LR 32									58		1		1	60	96.67%
LR 4										36				36	100.00%
LR 56											12			12	100.00%
IN 1												48		48	100.00%
Average															99.14%

Figure 20. Results of the sorting pretest. Source: author's representation.

According to Pelz (2008), the substantive validity coefficient is calculated by dividing the sum of all correct assignments by the number of participants. According to Ullrich (2011), the substantive validity coefficient can have a value between 1.00 and -1.00. According to Mathieu (2004), the value correlates positively with the substantive validity. According to Anderson and Gerbing (1991, as cited in Daiser, 2018, p.363), a value of $c_{sv} > 0.50$ is considered appropriate. At the item level, the values of the sorting pretest were between $c_{sv} = .83$ and $c_{sv} = 1.00$. The mean was $c_{sv} = .87$.

The classic pretest was the last development pretest for the development of the questionnaire. $N = 14$ participants were interviewed during the classic pretest.

The participants were asked to answer the questionnaire online. In the free text fields from the pretest function of SoSciSurvey,[103] the participants were able to assess the understanding of the questions and enter suggestions for improvement. According to Lozar, Manfreda and Vehovar (1999, as cited in Lütters, 2004, p. 167), an advantage of the classic pretest via the online platform to be used is that slow data connections can be identified that increase the risk of the drop-out rate. Based on the results of this pretest, only minor changes were applied to the questionnaire.

The expert discussion was carried out with Prof. Dr. Lutz Hoffmann from the FOM University of Economics and Management. The focus of this discussion was on the indicators used to operationalize the latent constructs, as well as the comprehensibility and selectivity of the questions.

Before the questionnaire was used in the field, the technical functionality test of SoSciSurvey was done. The focus was on the correct order of the questions, the display in the desired format and the completeness of the questionnaire. After the test run, it was also checked as to whether the answers were correctly reproduced in the output file. Furthermore, whether the given answers were correctly evaluated in the output file was also checked. Three test runs were performed.

4.2. SAMPLE

The sample of a qualitative study can be either defined as probabilistic or non-probabilistic. According to Riesenhuber (2007), probabilistic samples are sought in practice in order to be able to make as precise as possible statements about a population. According to Bortz and Döring (2006), probabilistic means that elements of the sample have the same probability of selection as the population the sample refers to. In order to be able to draw a probabilistic sample, it is necessary, according to Ritschl and Stamm (2016), to know all of the individuals in a population. As discussed in the chapter *Selling Center*, the compositions of selling center teams can differ depending on their respective sales project. Therefore, a probabilistic sample is not possible for this survey. However, according to Bortz

[103] The online survey platform SoSciSurvey was used to conduct the survey. The reasons for choosing SoSciSurvey are discussed in the chapter *Implementation of the survey*.

and Döring (2006) and Riesenhuber (2007), a probabilistic sample can hardly ever be implemented perfectly in practice.

According to Albers, Klapper, Konradt, Walter and Wolf (2009), if a probabilistic sample cannot be drawn, the sample is considered non-probabilistic. Döring and Bortz (2016) differentiate non-probabilistic samples into intentional samples and unconscious samples. According to Hofmann and Hofmann (2005), an intentional sample must consist of survey participants who are relevant for the research topic and testing the formulated hypotheses, while these requirements are not necessary for unconscious samples. The sample was identified in the same way as the participants in the qualitative study, taking into account evidence of existing selling center experience.[104] Based on the recommendations of Hollenberg (2016), individual messages were sent to each interview participant explaining the research purpose, the opportunity to participate in the test-retest procedure and the importance of existing selling center experience for participation.

A total of 218 participants participated in this survey. As discussed in the chapter *Conception of the questionnaire*, the prerequisite for usable datasets was that survey participants at least answer the main part of the questionnaire as well as the demographic questions about gender and hierarchy level. 52 participants canceled the questionnaire prematurely. Thus, a total of $N = 166$ datasets were generated for further analysis. This resulted in a drop-out rate of 23.85%. Comparatively, according to Knapp and Heidingsfeld (2001, as cited in Schaffrath, Schulz & Kautz, 2018, p. 55), the average drop-out rate for online surveys is around 50% from the first question.

4.2.1. Characteristics of the survey participants

According to Domes, Ditzen and Barth (2019), only characteristics of survey participants with relevance to methodological evaluations or with relevance for possible replications of a study should be discussed. In this survey, genders and hierarchy levels are relevant for the research question and methodological evaluation. For a replication of this study, the age of the survey participants is also

[104] The detailed description of this procedure can be found in the chapter *Recruitment of the interview participants*.

considered useful. The survey consisted of 38% female survey participants and 62% male survey participants. 45% of the survey participants were at high hierarchy levels and 39% of the survey participants were at low hierarchy levels. The remaining 16% of the survey participants were located in medium hierarchy levels. The survey participants were 21-62 years old.[105] The average age was 36 years. Table 55 shows the results. For further information regarding the characteristics of the survey participants, the answers to the demographic standards can be found in Appendix L.

Table 55.

Demographic data of the survey participants (source: author's representation).

Characteristics of Survey Participants	*N*	Percent of Participants
Male	101	60.84
Female	65	39.16
High Hierarchy Level	75	45.18
Medium Hierarchy Level	65	39.16
Low Hierarchy Level	26	15.66
21-30 Years	47	28.31
30-40 Years	43	25.90
40-50 Years	22	13.25
50-60 Years	16	9.64
60-62 Years	2	1.20
Age not specified	36	21.69

4.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SURVEY

The survey was carried out as an online survey. According to Porst (2014), online surveys are recommended due to their consistent layout as well as the possibility to exclude crosses between answer boxes that make answers to questions uninterpretable. The decision was made on SoSciSurvey because of its

[105] This age was calculated based on the 2019 survey year.

high customizability.[106] Rewards for participation in this survey were not offered in order to avoid negative impacts on data quality.[107] People who have no selling center experience, for example, could be motivated by rewards to still participate in this survey. The survey period lasted 9.5 weeks and took place from April 21, 2019 until June 26, 2019.

4.4. QUALITY CRITERIA

In empirical social research, quantitative studies, according to Böhmer (2015), must meet the requirements of validity, reliability and objectivity. According to Bühner (2011), these requirements are also called main quality criteria. According to Bortz and Döring (2006), there are further requirements for questionnaires in terms of standardization, comparability, economy and usefulness. According to Bortz and Döring (2006), these requirements are called secondary quality criteria. These quality criteria for the quantitative part of the study are discussed below.

4.4.1 Validity

As shown in the chapter *Construction of questionnaire items*, the type of measurement model used has an influence on the quality criteria to be checked. According to Brinkhoff (2008), the validity of reflective measurement models is checked against content validity, convergence validity, discriminant validity and nomological validity. However, the validity check of single-item measurement models according to Piehler (2011) is only possible to a limited extent. Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, Richter and Hauff (2017) propose testing single-item measurement models for criterion validity. The documents created to check validity are in Appendix K.

The first type of validity for multi-item measurement models is content validity. According to Bortz and Döring (2006), content validity describes whether a construct is covered comprehensively in its most important aspects. According to

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[106] The high customizability of SoSciSurvey is also highlighted positively in Kotulla (2012). The link to SoSciSurvey is www.soscisurvey.de.

[107] The negative impact of rewards on data quality are, for example, discussed in Mohr (2009).

Krafft, Gotz and Liehr-Gobbers (2005, as cited in Brinkmann, 2008, p. 2008), the recommended way to check for content validity is to perform a sorting pretest. The substantive validity coefficient and the hit rate of the sorting pretest were both within acceptable ranges, as discussed in the chapter *Pretests*. According to Brinkmann (2008) and Bürgisser (2012), a second way to ensure the content validity of a questionnaire is to derive questionnaire items based on existing literature in the field and review them in an expert discussion. As discussed in the previous chapters, the questionnaire items were formulated on existing literature and a review also took place in an expert discussion.

The second type of validity for multi-item measurement models is convergence validity. According to Dodel (2004), convergence validity describes whether constructs are really represented by their respective indicators. Like content validity, convergence validity can also be tested with a sorting pretest according to Giere (2007). As discussed above, the results of the sorting pretest were within the acceptable range.

The third type of validity for multi-item measurement models is discriminant validity. According to Meik (2016), discriminant validity describes how strongly a construct delimits itself from another construct. The discriminant validity was based on Brinkmann (2008) and Bürgisser (2012) and confirmed by a theory-based derivation of the questionnaire items as well as within the expert discussion. According to Giere (2007), discriminant validity can also be checked by a sorting pretest. Both an expert discussion and a sorting pretest were carried out for the individual questionnaire items.

The fourth type of validity for multi-item measurement models is nomological validity. According to Peter (1981, as cited in Gegenmüller, 2012, p. 160), nomological validity describes the degree to which relations of a construct to other constructs can be predicted. According to Netemeyer (2003, as cited in Wilrodt, 2004, p. 106), an examination of nomological validity therefore requires a superordinate theory of causal relationships between these constructs. According to Hafenstein (2016), testing for nomological validity only makes sense if the purpose of the survey is to test the relationships between the individual constructs. In this study, no causal relationships between constructs were assumed. Testing for nomological validity was therefore not considered useful.

The type of validity to check single-item measurement models is *criterion validity*. According to Asendorpf (2004), criterion validity is a special form of construct validity. According to Asendorpf (2004) criterion validity is given when measurements of indicators correlate highly with the construct to be measured. According to Schilke (2007) and Lütje (2009), criterion validity can be predicted by a substantive validity coefficient. The substantive validity coefficient of the sorting pretest was within the acceptable range.

4.4.2. Reliability

Several methods were used to check the reliability of the questionnaire. These are the test-retest method, consistency analysis and corrected item-total-correlations. The documents created to check reliability can be found in Appendix K.

The first test for reliability was the test-retest method. According to Häder (2006), test-retest reliability (r_{tt}) explains the measurement stability of a test instrument. For the test-retest method, a sub-sample of N = 45 participants could be interviewed. The test-retest interval was determined based on literature. When determining the test-retest interval, according to Moosbrugger and Kelava (2012) p. 12, potential exercise and memory effects due to time intervals that are too short and changes of opinions and attitudes due to time intervals that are too long should be avoided. A reasonable time interval, according to Rischer (2008), is between four and six weeks. However, a lack of feedback from survey participants partly led to longer time intervals:

- thirty-three survey participants repeated the test within four to six weeks
- eleven survey participants repeated the test within seven weeks
- one survey participant repeated the test within eight weeks

The two tests were matched using the six-digit code that could be entered on page two of the questionnaire. The data of both tests were correlated by the Pearson correlation coefficient, which according to Schendera (2008) must be used for interval-scaled data. In line with the recommendation of Schulz and Renn (2009) and Sauerwein (2018), only data series in which no evasive category was used were considered for the analysis. The results varied between r_{tt} = .70 and r_{tt} = .92 for each

item.[108] According to Maltby, Day and Macaskill (2011) and Achouri (2010), a value of r_{tt} = .70 or higher is considered sufficient. Items with r_{tt}> .90 are classified as excellent according to Häßler and Reis (2005).

The second test for reliability was to check the internal consistency of the questionnaire. As recommended by Döhring and Bortz (2016), Zboralski (2007) and Uhrich (2008), Cronbach's alpha (α) was determined during the consistency analysis of the reflective measurement models. The evaluation was carried out by using the statistical software R. The values were between α = 0.75 and α = 0.82 for five constructs. According to Brosis (2008), values of α > 0.7 are considered acceptable. According to Krummaker (2007), values of α > 0.8 are even considered very good. For two constructs, the values were between α = 0.60 and α = 0.64. An increase of Cronbach's Alpha by omitting items could not be achieved. Nevertheless, these items can still be rated as internally consistent, as according to Korgaonkar, Lund and Price (1985, as cited in Morschett, 2002, p. 423), values of between α = .50 and α = .70 are still sufficient for the first construction of new scales. Table 56 shows the results of the internal consistency analysis and the upper and lower limits of the 95% confidence interval.[109]

[108] According to Achouri (2010), the test-retest coefficient is stated with two decimal places to avoid rounding differences.

[109] Herkner and Muellner (2011) recommend specifying the 95% confidence interval (CI) when presenting the results of internal consistency analyses.

Table 56.

Cronbach's Alpha per questionnaire item (source: author's representation).

Scale ID	*N*	Cronbach's Alpha	95% CI
AF04	4	.77	[.71, .83]
AF06	4	.82	[.77, .86]
AF08	5	.64	[.55, .72]
AF09	10	.82	[.78, .87]
AF10	6	.82	[.78, .86]
AF11	3	.75	[.69, .82]
AF13	4	.60	[.51, .70]

Notes: N denotes the number of statements contained. CI is an abbreviation for confidence interval.

As recommended by Bühner (2011), an analysis of the corrected item-to-total-correlation (*CITC*) was done to see if an item removal was necessary. According to Gerich (2010, as cited in Barry, 2014, p. 169) and Ziemeck (2006), the *CITC* should be least .20. The values of the examined items were between *CITC* = .30 and *CITC* = .71. Even the more conservative limit *CITC* = .30, as recommended by Ziemek (2006), could be achieved using this result.

4.4.3. Objectivity

Gültekin and Liebchen (2003) define three types of objectivity: *implementation objectivity*, *evaluation objectivity*, and *interpretation objectivity*. The respective types will be discussed below.

Implementation objectivity in the context of online surveys is provided by Welker (2014), and means when all participants can visualize the questions in the same way. In addition, according to Schelten (1997), the questionnaire instructions should be clearly defined. The presentation of the questionnaire was checked with the technical functionality test of SoSciSurvey. The instructions were checked for clear definitions using the QAS-99 and the checklist of Berger-Graber.

According to Kubbe (2016), evaluation objectivity describes the extent to which the same behavior of a participant is always evaluated in the same way.

Evaluation objectivity was ensured in accordance with Ferber (2014) by using bound response formats.

According to Wiegand (1998), interpretational objectivity means that at least two examiners independently of each other come to the same interpretational result. In line with Fromm (2018), this was ensured by the use of rule-based, comprehensible evaluation methods and the definition of statistical limit values.

4.4.4. Secondary quality criteria

The four secondary quality criteria *standardization*, *comparability*, *economy* and *usefulness* are discussed below.

The first secondary quality criterion is *standardization*. According to Graf (2008), standardization is the classification of test results into a uniform reference system. According to Graf (2008), this can be ensured, for example, by calculating parameters like standard deviations or mean values. These parameters were taken into account within the presentation of the descriptive evaluation.

The second quality criterion is *comparability*. According to Bundschuh and Winkler (2019), comparability means that the questionnaire has a parallel form with largely the same validity. According to Bundschuh and Winkler (2019), this is advantageous, for example, if the results of an exam are to be compared. Since new questionnaire items were developed and therefore no comparable questionnaire version is available, the secondary quality criterion, comparability, cannot be met. However, according to Honermann, Müssen, Brinkmann and Schiepek (1999), comparability is more relevant for diagnostic questionnaires and less for social science surveys.

The third secondary quality criterion is *economy*. According to Fehling (2008), economy means that a short processing time is necessary, less material is used and fast evaluation times are possible. The questionnaire concept focused on a short processing time to reduce the dropout rate. Since the questionnaire was carried out online, no material such as paper and pencil was required. The evaluation of the questionnaire could be evaluated with the statistical software R, which favored a short evaluation time.

According to Lienert and Raatz (1998, as cited in Fehling, 2008, p. 82), *usefulness* describes there being a practical need for this study. The quantitative part

of the study was preceded by an exploratory study. The importance of researching the constructs identified related to acceptance of leadership within selling centers is therefore based on data and facts.

4.5. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Quantitative statistics can be subdivided into three areas. According to Kirchhoff, Kuhnt, Lipp and Schlawin (2008), these are *descriptive statistics*, *inductive statistics* and *explorative statistics*. According to Rasch, Friese, Hofmann and Naumann (2006), the task of descriptive statistics is to organize, display and summarize data. According to Fahrmeier (1997, as cited in Kirchhoff, Kuhnt, Lipp & Schlawin, 2008, p. 71), the task of inductive statistics is to generalize the results of a sample to the respective population. According to Rohwer (2018), many considerations of inductive statistics focus on testing hypotheses. According to Fahrmeier (1997, as cited in Kirchhoff, Kuhnt, Lipp & Schlawin, 2008, p. 71), the task of exploratory statistics is to find new structures, questions, and to derive new hypotheses. The descriptive part of this study is discussed below. Induction and exploration are discussed in the chapter *Inferential statistical evaluation of the results*. The last part of this chapter deals with the evaluation of the free text fields at the end of the questionnaire.

4.5.1. Descriptive evaluation

According to Schendera (2015), *descriptive statistics* are the foundation of every professional data analysis, as they reduce structures and summarize data. According to Rau (2004), the most important instruments of descriptive statistics are tables, diagrams and measures. According to Käppler (2015), a descriptive statistical analysis should contain positional dimensions and scattered dimensions of data as measures. According to Neroth (2012), the mean values of scales (M) are commonly suggested as positional dimensions, and the standard deviations (SD) are commonly suggested as scattered dimensions. Before the results are discussed in detail, they are shown in Table 57.

Table 57.

Descriptive evaluation of the quantitative survey (source: author's representation).

Construct	*M*	*SD*	95% CI
LR 56	4.45	0.79	[4.33, 4.57]
CN 41	4.41	0.85	[4.17, 4.39]
CN 51	4.28	0.70	[4.29, 4.55]
LR 2	4.16	0.53	[4.07, 4.24]
CN 3	4.26	0.68	[4.04, 4.26]
CN 21	4.05	0.96	[3.90, 4.20]
CN 1	4.05	1.06	[3.88, 4.22]
LS 13	3.93	1.00	[3.78, 4.08]
IN 1	3.91	0.66	[3.81, 4.02]
LR 32	3.86	0.68	[3.75, 3.96]
LR 11	3.39	0.60	[3.29, 3.48]
LR 4	2.85	0.97	[2.69, 3.00]

The highest mean was 4.45 (SD = 0.79) for the scale *collegiality* (LR 56). The male survey participants generated a mean of 4.47 (SD = 0.75) and the female survey participants a mean of 4.41 (SD = 0.85). Respondents who were at a high level of hierarchy generated a mean of 4.53 (SD = 0.76), and respondents on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.30 (SD = 0.85). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 21.

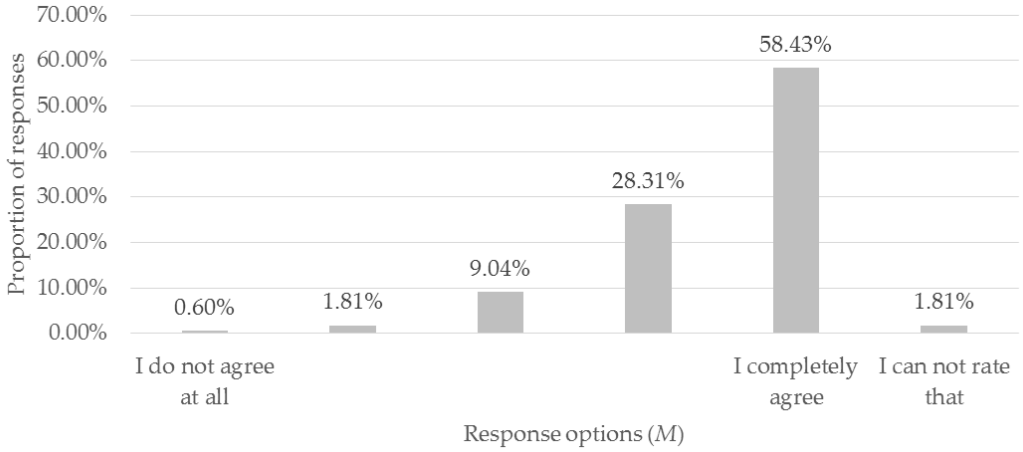

Figure 21. Frequency distribution for the scale collegiality. Source: author's representation.

For the scale *goal orientation* (CN 41), a mean of 4.41 (SD = .85) was generated. It was the second highest mean. The mean of the male survey participants was 4.53 (SD = 0.66), while the mean of the female survey participants was 4.23 (SD = 0.81). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.47 (SD = 0.86), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.35 (SD = 0.85). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 22.

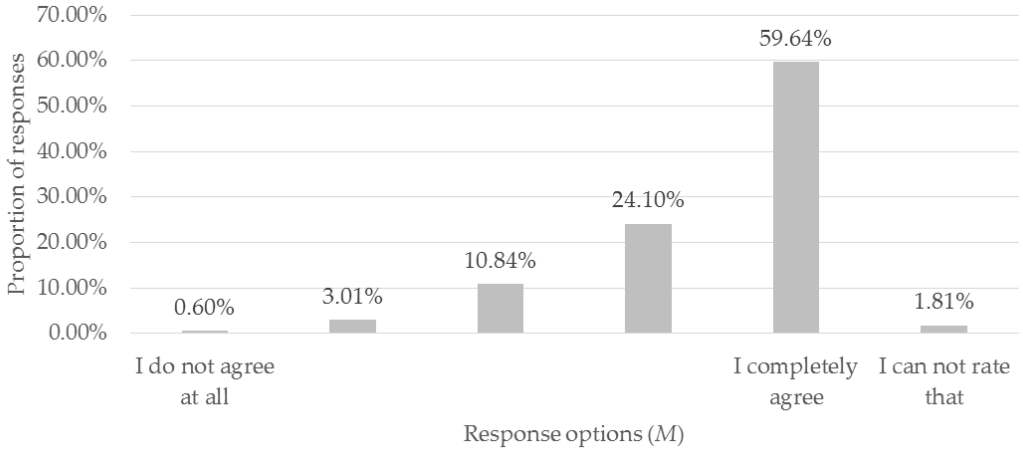

Figure 22. Frequency distribution for the scale goal orientation. Source: author's representation.

For *collegiality and affiliation* (CN 51), the mean was 4.28 (SD = .70). It was the third highest mean. The mean of the male survey participants was 4.20 (SD = 0.68), and the mean of the female survey participants was 4.39 (SD = 0.73). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.27 (SD = 0.63), while the survey participants on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.29 (SD = 0.79). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 23.

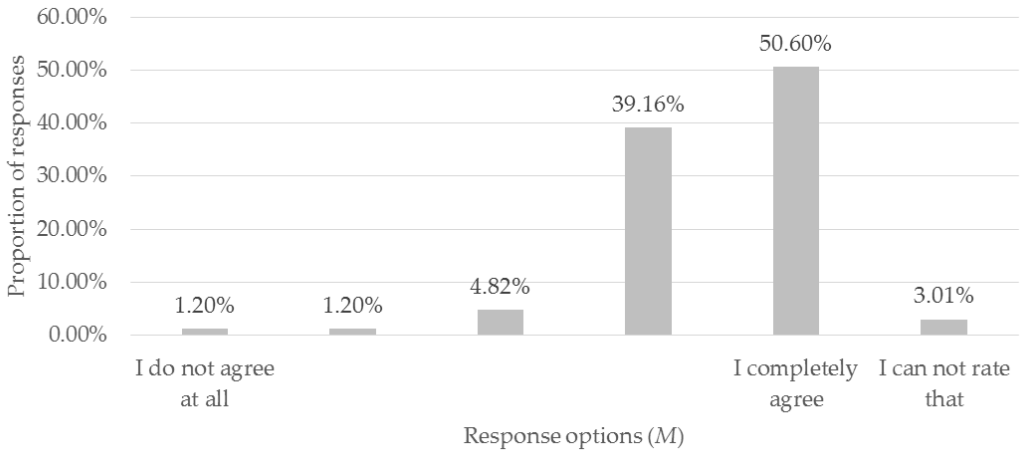

Figure 23. Frequency distribution for the scale collegiality and affiliation. Source: author's representation.

The fourth highest scale mean was 4.16 (*SD* = .53) for *intelligence* (LR 2) and thus the fourth highest mean. The mean of the male survey participants was 4.12 (*SD* = 0.53), and for the female survey participants 4.22 (*SD* = 0.54). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.21 (*SD* = 0.44), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level a mean of 4.13 (*SD* = 0.65). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 24.

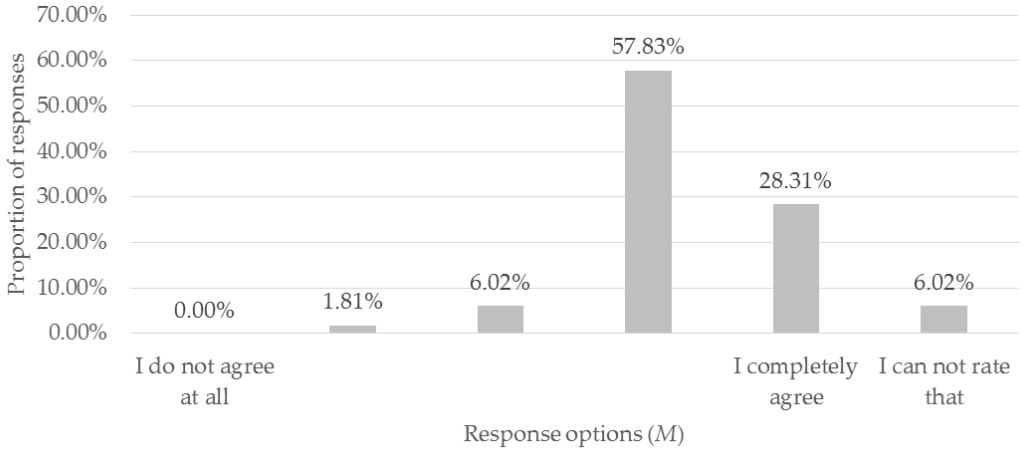

Figure 24. Frequency distribution for the scale intelligence. Source: author's representation.

For the scale *resources* (CN 3), a mean of 4.26 (*SD* = .68) was generated. This result was therefore number 5 in the highest scale average. The mean of the male survey participants was 4.07 (*SD* = 0.68), and 4.28 for the female survey participants (*SD* = 0.66). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a scale mean of 4.21 (*SD* = 0.61), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level a mean of 4.10 (*SD* = 0.75). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 25.

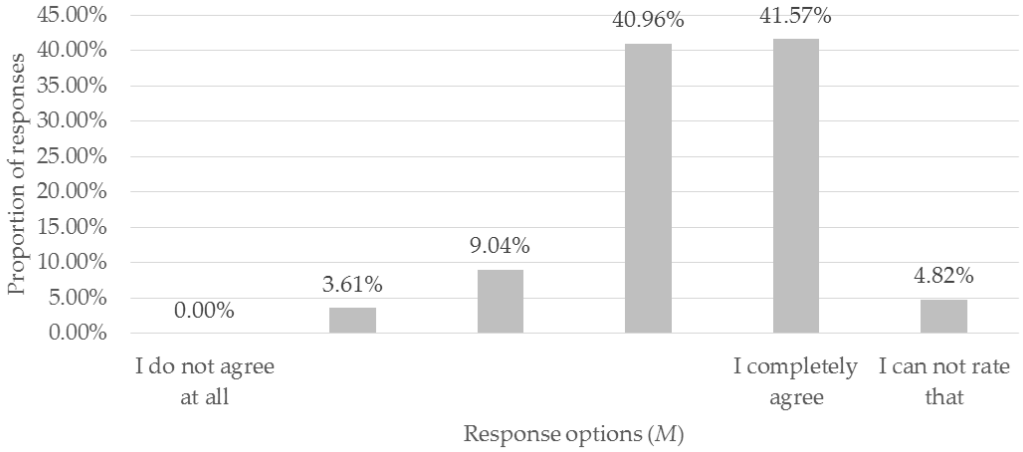

Figure 25. Frequency distribution for the scale resources. Source: author's representation.

For *transparency* (CN 21), the mean was 4.05 (*SD* = .96). This ranked sixth on a scale of all averages. The mean of the male survey participants was 4.09 (*SD* = 1.02) and 3.98 for the female survey participants (*SD* = 0.88). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.07 (*SD* = 1.02), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level a mean of 4.03 (*SD* = 0.99). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 26.

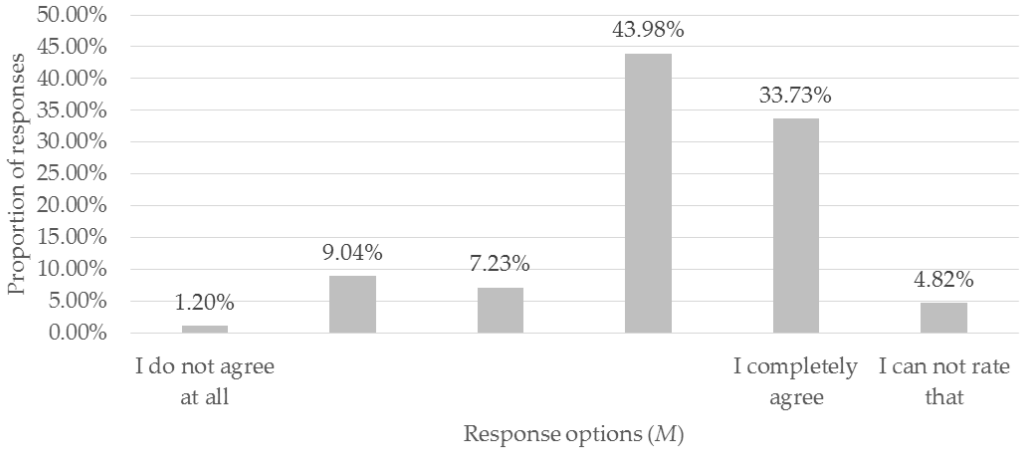

Figure 26. Frequency distribution for the scale transparency. Source: author's representation.

The mean for the scale *performance incentives* (CN 1) is 4.05 (*SD* = 1.06). This result is therefore shared with project transparency rank 6. The mean of the male survey participants was 4.20 (*SD* = 1.00), and 3.80 for the female survey participants (*SD* = 1.13). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 4.24 (*SD* = 1.05), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.88 (*SD* = 1.05). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 27.

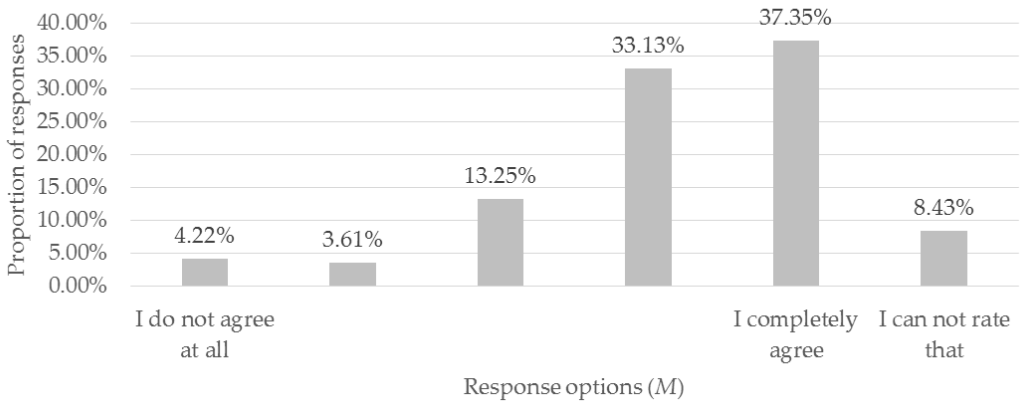

Figure 27. Frequency distribution for the scale performance incentives. Source: author's representation.

The seventh-highest mean of 3.93 (*SD* = 1.00) was generated for *participatory leadership* (LS 13). The mean of the male survey participants was 4.04 (*SD* = 0.92), and 3.75 for the female survey participants (*SD* = 1.11). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.91 (*SD* = 1.04), and the respondents on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.95 (*SD* = 0.91). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 28.

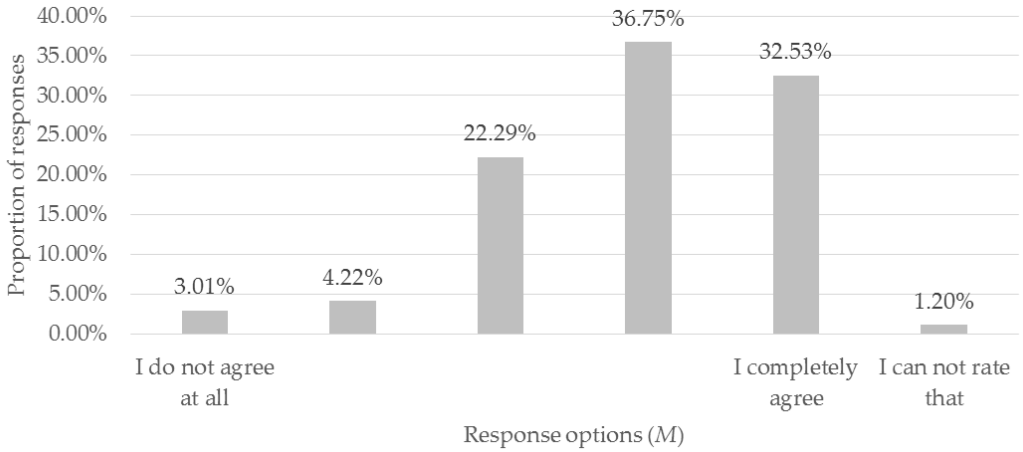

Figure 28. Frequency distribution for the scale participatory leadership. Source: author's representation.

The mean for *accurate and clear work instructions* (IN 1) was 3.91 (*SD* = .66). The mean of the male survey participants was 3.96 (*SD* = 0.68), and 3.84 for the female survey participants (*SD* = 0.64). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.97 (*SD* = 0.66), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level a mean of 3.94 (*SD* = 0.62). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 29.

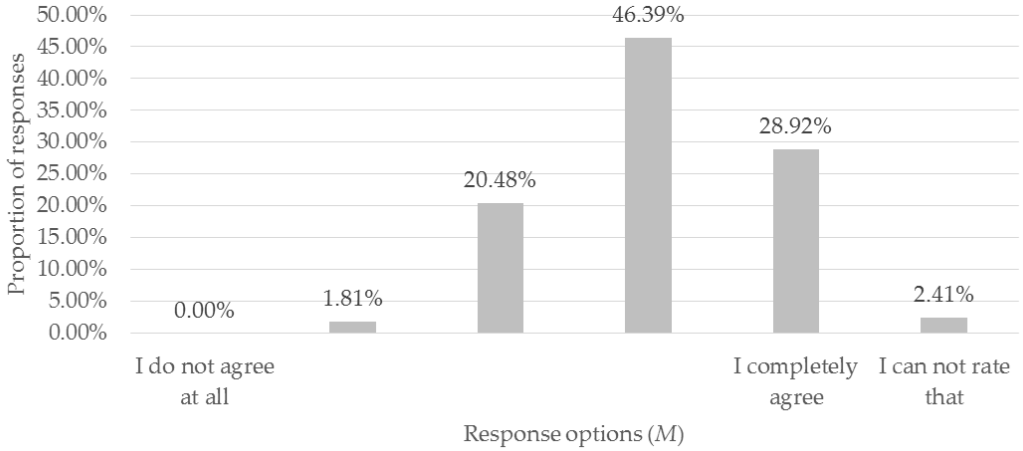

Figure 29. Frequency distribution for the scale accurate and clear work instructions. Source: author's representation.

For *social-communicative competence* (LR 32), a mean of 3.86 (*SD* = .68) was generated. The mean on this scale ranked 9th. The mean of the male survey participants was 3.87 (*SD* = 0.69), and for the female survey participants 3.84 (*SD* = 0.68). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.97 (*SD* = 0.62), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.86 (*SD* = 0.73). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 30.

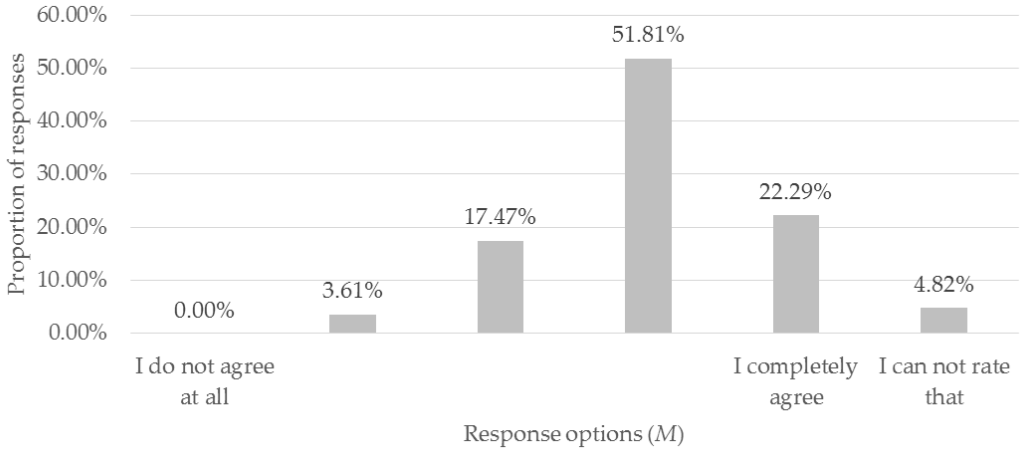

Figure 30. Frequency distribution for the scale social-communicative competence. Source: author's representation.

For the scale *extraversion* (LR 11), a mean of 3.39 (*SD* = .60) was created, which ranked tenth. The mean of the male survey participants was 3.34 (*SD* = 0.54), and for the female survey participants 3.46 (*SD* = 0.67). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.36 (*SD* = 0.60), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.44 (*SD* = 0.59). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 31.

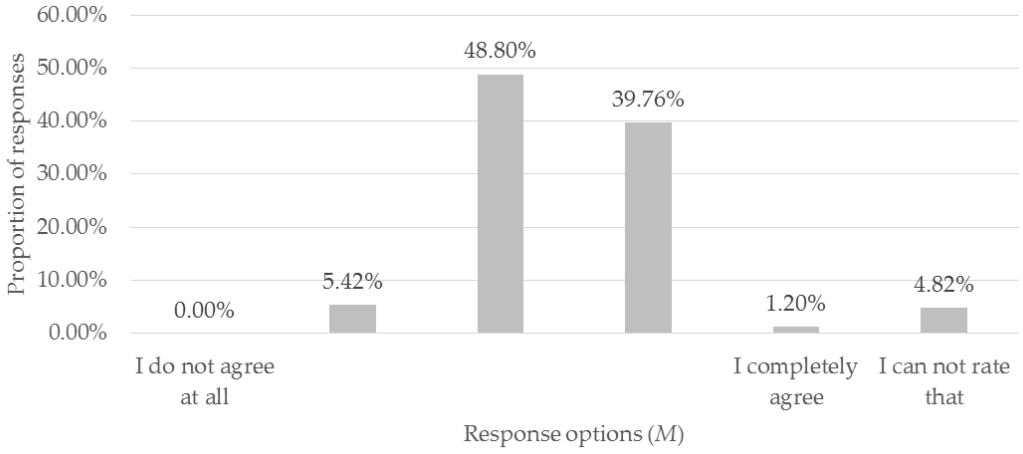

Figure 31. Frequency distribution for the scale extraversion. Source: author's representation.

The lowest mean was generated for the scale *experience* (LR 4). This was 2.85 (*SD* = .97). The mean of the male survey participants was 3.34 (*SD* = 0.54), and for the female survey participants 3.46 (*SD* = 0.67). The survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.36 (*SD* = 0.60), and the survey participants on a low hierarchy level generated a mean of 3.44 (*SD* = 0.59). The relative distribution of all responses is shown in Figure 32.

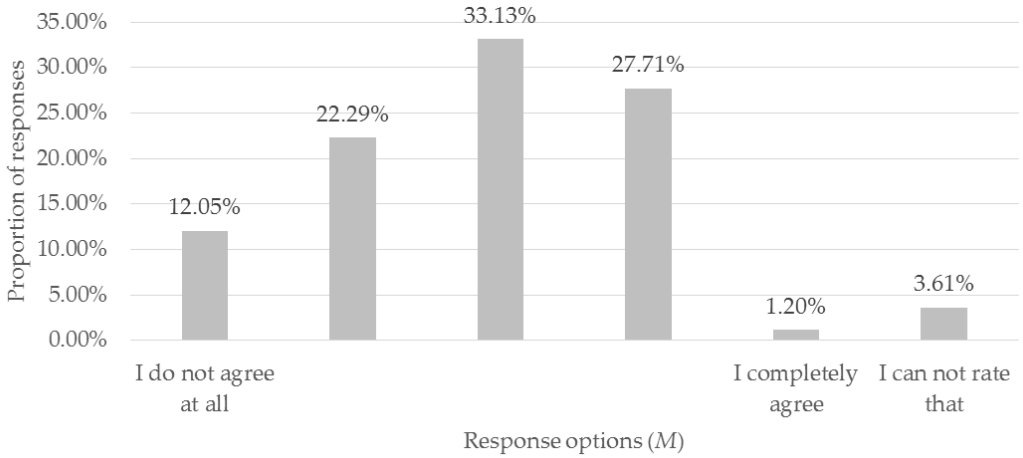

Figure 32. Frequency distribution for the scale experience. Source: author's representation.

4.5.2. Inferential statistical evaluation

The use of statistical significance tests with regard to non-probabilistic samples is controversial within scientific society. Döring and Bortz (2016) compared the most common scientific opinions for and against this approach. They came to the conclusion that statistical significance tests are appropriate if the sample fulfills the criterion of expediency. According to Döring and Bortz (2016), this criterion is met if a sample can represent the population in an appropriate manner with regard to the research problem. In this study, expediency was ensured by selecting participants based on their selling center experience. In order to increase the quality of the statistical analysis, the effect sizes were evaluated and a Bonferroni correction was applied:

- According to Lohmann (2019) and Güttler (2009), the effect size shows the practical relevance of the statistical test.[110] According to Janczyk and Pfister (2015), the specification of effect sizes is becoming increasingly important within scientific community, as it enables better interpretation and comparability of results.
- Since several hypotheses were tested, there is a chance, according to Kühnel and Krebs (2010), of getting a significant result even though a null hypothesis is wrong. Therefore, as recommended by Wilker (2018), a Bonferroni correction was made to counter the alpha error inflation due to multiple tests.[111]

The following calculations were carried out using R statistical software. All survey results and calculations are documented in Appendix L.

4.5.2.1. Exact binomial test

While the descriptive statistics already provided an initial overview about the ranking of factors, inference statistics were used to check which factors are significantly important statistically for the majority of selling center participants. Therefore, an exact binomial test was used.[112] In order to check whether factors are important, answers above the theoretical scale mean were taken into account. A scale mean of > 3.00 was rated as an important factor, while a scale mean of ≤ 3.00 was rated as an unimportant factor.[113] According to Rumsey (2016), the results of a binomial test are statistically significant if the p-value falls below the error probability α = .05. By applying the Bonferroni correction, this limit decreased to $\alpha_{corr} = \alpha / 14 = .004$.

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[110] According to Reichl (2005), the calculation of an effect size only makes sense if there is a statistically significant result.

[111] According to Messer and Schneider (2019), the Bonferroni correction divides the p-value by the number of hypothesis tests.

[112] According to Crawley (2012), an exact binomial test checks a defined answer for statistical significance. In order to do so, according to Norcliffe (1981), dichotomous answer options are compared. According to Eckstein (2006), this test is of particular practical importance in economics and social sciences.

[113] This approach has also been applied by Otte (2014).

For *performance incentives* (CN 1), *project transparency* (CN 21), *resources* (CN 3), *goal orientation* (CN 41), *collegiality and affiliation on a team level* (CN 5), *participatory leadership* (LS 13), *extraversion* (LR 11), *social-communicative competence* (LR 32), *collegiality* (LR 56) as well as *accuracy and clarity of work instructions* (IN 1), the majority of survey participants generated a mean of > 3.00. For each of these results, the p-values were below the defined limit of α_{corr} = .004. Therefore, the underlying hypotheses H_1, H_2, H_8, H_9, $H_{9.1}$, H_{11}, H_{14}, H_{19}, H_{21}, H_{32}, H_{34} and $H_{35.1}$ can be considered confirmed.

The result of *experience* (LR 4) was not statistically significant and thus inconsistent with hypothesis H_{26}. Less than half of all participants generated a mean > 3.00 (p = .952). Table 58 shows the results of the exact binomial tests, including Cohen's d and the limits of the 95% confidence interval.

Table 58.

Results of the exact binomial test (source: author's representation).

Construct	Proportion > 3.00	p-Value	*D*	95 % CI
CN 1	77%	< .001	0.99	[.70, 1.00]
CN 21	82%	< .001	1.09	[.76, 1.00]
CN 3	92%	< .001	1.85	[.87, 1.00]
CN 41	85%	< .001	1.66	[.80, 1.00]
CN 51	95%	< .001	1.83	[.79, 1.00]
LS 13	70%	< .001	0.93	[.63, 1.00]
LR 11	68%	< .001	0.65	[.61, 1.00]
LR 2	96%	< .001	2.19	[.93, 1.00]
LR 32	85%	< .001	1.26	[.79, 1.00]
LR 4	44%	.952	- 0.15	[.37, 1.00]
LR 56	68%	< .001	1.84	[.61, 1.00]
IN 1	86%	< .001	0.66	[.81, 1.00]

Notes: N = 166. Except of LR 14, all results are below the limit of α_{corr} = *.004.* Proportion refers to the respective mean values.

4.5.2.2. Evaluation of intergroup differences by hierarchy level

For the evaluation of intergroup differences by hierarchy level, the respective constructs were defined as dependent variables and either belong to a high hierarchical level (n = 75), or belong to a low hierarchical level (n = 65) as independent variables. In order to select the correct statistical test, the data was first checked for equality of variances and normal distributions.[114]

Martens (2003) recommends carrying out the Levene test[115] for checking the equality of variances of the two groups. The Levene test has the advantage over other tests for equality of variance according to Janssen and Laatz (2013) in that it does not depend on the normal distribution of a population. Equality of variance can be assumed according to Webinger, Keller and Budrich (2018) if a p-value of .05 is not exceeded. In the majority of the tests, equality of variance could be assumed. The variances of extraversion (LR 11) and experience (LR 4) were not assumed to be equal, as the p-value was exceeded.

Stötzer (2017) recommends carrying out the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for checking normal distribution.[116] Normal distribution can be assumed according to Sheskin (2004) if a p-value of .05 is not exceeded by both groups. During all tests, this limit was exceeded by at least one group. In a second step, the Shapiro-Wilk test was carried out. According to Stötzer (2017), this test sets less conservative limits for normal distribution.[117] In the majority of the tests, the p-value of .05 was not exceeded by at least one group. However, the limit for the p-value of

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[114] According to Pleier (2003), equality of variance and normal distribution are prerequisites for parametric test methods. If these requirements are not met, non-parametric test methods can be used according to Bortz and Lienert (2003, as cited in Pleier, 2008, p. 76), but these are considered to be less robust.

[115] According to Janssen and Laatz (2013), the Levene test is a special variant of the F-test.

[116] The use of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is recommended according to Brosius (2008), especially for large samples (N >50).

[117] According to Brosius (2008), the use of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is ususally recommended for smaller samples (N <50). Since the Shapiro-Wilk test is less conservative, according to Buehner and Ziegler (2009), also the respective result is less.

extraversion (LR 11) was exceeded by both survey participants at a high hierarchy level and survey participants at a low hierarchy level. Table 59 presents the results.

Table 59.

Check for requirements for parametric tests by hierarchy level (source: author's representation).

		Levene		Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
Construct	Hierarchy	F	p-value	D	p-value	W	p-value
CN 1	High	0.174	0.678	0.933	< .001	.727	< .001
	Low			0.926	< .001	.821	< .001
CN 21	High	1.452	0.231	0.977	< .001	.779	< .001
	Low			0.944	< .001	.736	< .001
CN 3	High	1.161	0.283	0.977	< .001	.897	< .001
	Low			0.977	< .001	.856	< .001
CN 41	High	0.713	0.400	0.977	< .001	.653	< .001
	Low			0.983	< .001	.738	< .001
CN 51	High	0.599	0.440	0.977	< .001	.890	< .001
	Low			0.965	< .001	.767	< .001
LS 13	High	2.129	0.147	0.937	< .001	.841	< .001
	Low			0.961	< .001	.845	< .001
LR 11	High	0.016	0.899	0.964	< .001	.977	.215
	Low			0.970	< .001	.974	.223
LR 2	High	2.895	0.091	0.998	< .001	.959	.022
	Low			0.971	< .001	.844	< .001
LR 32	High	1.212	0.273	0.977	< .001	.963	.033
	Low			0.969	< .001	.957	.028
LR 4	High	0.007	0.934	0.868	< .001	.946	.003
	Low			0.909	< .001	.945	.009
LR 56	High	1.953	0.165	0.985	< .001	.654	< .001
	Low			0.962	< .001	.739	< .001

		Levene		Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
Construct	Hierarchy	F	p-value	D	p-value	W	p-value
IN 1	High	0.175	0.676	0.977	< .001	.941	.002
	Low			0.997	< .001	.952	.016

Since *extraversion* (LR 11) met the requirements for a parametric test, a t-test for independent samples was applied based on the recommendation of Budrich, Keller and Schmidt (2018).[118] According to Bühner and Ziegler (2009), a difference between two samples can be considered confirmed if the p-value is below α = .05. Since this is an exploratory analysis, according to Faller and Lang (2018), no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error was applied. The p-value for extraversion was .490. The effect size according to Cohen's d was .120. Table 60 presents the results.

Table 60.

Differences in subgroup means by hierarchy for extraversion (source: author's representation).

		t Test				
Construct	Hierarchy	T	Dgf	p-value	*M*	*SD*
LR 11	High	-0.693	132	.490	3.36	0.60
	Low				3.44	0.59

Note: The abbreviation Dgf stands for degrees of freedom.

In line with Tokarski (2008) and Günthner (2014), results with no prerequisites for parametric tests were checked using the Mann-Whitney U test. According to Eckstein (2006), a difference between the two groups is considered statistically significant if the p-value falls below the error probability α =.05. The results are shown in Table 61.

[118] According to Benesch (2013), a t-test is considered a robust test to detect statistically significant differences between two samples.

The results show that the p-value for goal orientation (CN 41) is above the defined limit of α_{corr} = .04, so hypothesis H9.1 could not be verified.

For *performance incentives* (CN 1), survey participants on a high hierarchy level generated a statistically significant (p = .015) higher mean (M = 4.24) than participants on a lower hierarchy level (M = 3.88). Since this is an exploratory analysis, no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error is applied. The effect size according to Cohen's d is .336.

For *experience* (LR 4), participants at a low hierarchy level generated a statistically significant (p <.001) higher mean (M = 3.11) than participants at a high hierarchy level (M = 2.54). For *performance incentives*, this is an exploratory analysis, so no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error is used. The effect size is d = .611.

Table 61.

Statistical significance of intergroup differences by hierarchy level (source: author's representation).

		Mann-Whitney			
Construct	Hierarchy	V	p-value	*M*	*SD*
CN 1	High	2475	.015	4.24	1.05
	Low			3.88	1.05
CN 21	High	2283.5	.649	4.07	1.02
	Low			4.03	0.99
CN 3	High	2272	.685	4.21	0.61
	Low			4.10	0.75
CN 41	High	2583.5	.212	4.47	0.86
	Low			4.35	0.85
CN 51	High	2135	.468	4.27	0.63
	Low			4.29	0.79
LS 13	High	2342.5	.930	3.91	1.04
	Low			3.95	0.91

		Mann-Whitney			
Construct	Hierarchy	V	p-value	*M*	*SD*
LR 11	High	2066.5	.459	3.36	0.60
	Low			3.44	0.59
LR 2	High	2169	.656	4.24	0.44
	Low			4.13	0.66
LR 32	High	2441	.431	3.97	0.62
	Low			3.86	0.73
LR 4	High	1501.5	<.001	2.54	0.92
	Low			3.11	0.96
LR 56	High	2784	.443	4.53	0.76
	Low			4.30	0.85
IN 1	High	2431.5	.562	3.97	0.66
	Low			3.94	0.62

4.5.2.3. Evaluation of intergroup differences by gender

The statistical evaluation of intergroup differences by gender followed the same procedure as the evaluation of intergroup differences by hierarchy level. The respective constructs were defined as dependent variables, while being a male survey participant (n = 101) and or a female survey participant (n = 65) were each defined as independent variables.

The results of the Levene test showed that there is no equality of variance for goal orientation (CN 41), extraversion (LR 11) and experience (LR 4). These p-values were below the specified limit of α = .05. The p-values of the other variables exceeded this limit.

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that none of the investigated p-values exceeded the limit of α = .05. Even the less conservative Shapiro-Wilk test did not produce a result in which both independent variables could exceed this limit. Table 62 shows the results.

Table 62.

Check for requirements for parametric tests by gender (source: author's representation).

		Levene Test		Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
Construct	Gender	F	p-value	D	p-value	W	p-value
CN 1	Male	< 0.001	.977	0.946	< .001	0.763	< .001
	Female			0.907	< .001	0.834	< .001
CN 21	Male	0.779	.379	0.956	< .001	0.760	< .001
	Female			0.977	< .001	0.830	< .001
CN 3	Male	0.018	.892	0.977	< .001	0.894	< .001
	Female			0.988	< .001	0.886	< .001
CN 41	Male	5.701	.018	0.969	< .001	0.631	< .001
	Female			0.977	< .001	0.788	< .001
CN 51	Male	0.013	.911	0.977	< .001	0.887	< .001
	Female			0.971	< .001	0.774	< .001
LS 13	Male	0.199	.657	0.967	< .001	0.836	< .001
	Female			0.914	< .001	0.846	< .001
LR 11	Male	4.929	.028	0.976	< .001	0.976	.067
	Female			0.964	< .001	0.960	.045
LR 2	Male	0.188	.666	0.980	< .001	0.906	< .001
	Female			0.982	< .001	0.903	< .001
LR 32	Male	0.605	.438	0.985	< .001	0.964	.009
	Female			0.961	< .001	0.936	.003
LR 4	Male	8.106	.005	0.868	< .001	0.938	< .001
	Female			0.928	< .001	0.964	.070
LR 56	Male	0.293	.589	0.989	< .001	0.694	< .001
	Female			0.977	< .001	0.710	< .001

		Levene Test		Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
Construct	Gender	F	p-value	D	p-value	W	p-value
IN 1	Male	0.002	.966	0.977	< .001	0.939	< .001
	Female			0.988	< .001	0.970	.122

Since none of the results met the requirements for a parametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed. Table 63 shows the results.

The results show that the p-value of participatory leadership style (LS 13) is above the defined limit of α_{corr} = .04, so hypothesis H 35.1 could not be verified.

For *performance incentives* (CN 1), male survey participants generated a statistically significant (p = .013) higher mean (M = 4.20) than female survey participants (M = 3.79). Since this is an exploratory analysis, no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error applies. The effect size according to Cohen's d is .392.

For *resources* (CN 3), female survey participants generated a statistically significant (p = .026) higher mean (M = 4.29) than male survey participants (M = 4.07). The effect size of Cohen's d was .318. Since this is also an exploratory analysis, no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error had to be performed.

For *goal orientation* (CN 41), the male survey participants generated a statistically significant (p = .011) higher mean (M = 4.53) than female survey participants (M = 4.23). The effect size of Cohen's d was .367. Since this was an exploratory analysis, no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error had to be performed.

For collegiality and affiliation on team level (CN 51), the female survey participants generated a statistically significant (p = .028) higher mean (M = 4.24) than male survey participants (M = 4.39). The effect size of Cohen's d was .262. Since this is an exploratory analysis, no Bonferroni correction of the alpha error was performed.

For experience (LR 4), the female survey participants generated a statistically significant (p = .002) higher mean (M = 3.16) than male survey participants (M = 2.65). The effect size of Cohen's d was .548. Because this is an exploratory analysis, a Bonferroni correction does not apply to the alpha error.

Table 63

Statistical significance of intergroup differences by gender (source: author's representation).

		Mann-Whitney			
Construct	Gender	V	p-value	*M*	*SD*
CN 1	Male	3319.5	.013	4.20	1.00
	Female			3.79	1.13
CN 21	Male	3314.5	0193	4.09	1.02
	Female			3.98	0.88
CN 3	Male	2227	.026	4.07	0.68
	Female			4.28	0.66
CN 41	Male	3782.5	.011	4.53	0.81
	Female			4.23	0.89
CN 51	Male	2458.5	.028	4.20	0.68
	Female			4.39	0.73
LS 13	Male	3599	.138	4.04	0.92
	Female			3.75	1.11
LR 11	Male	2550	.143	3.34	0.54
	Female			3.46	0.67
LR 2	Male	2519	.168	4.12	0.53
	Female			4.22	0.54
LR 32	Male	3063	.757	3.87	0.69
	Female			3.84	0.68
LR 4	Male	2145.5	.002	2.65	1.02
	Female			3.16	0.79
LR 56	Male	3234	.799	4.48	0.75
	Female			4.41	0.85
IN 1	Male	3501	.185	3.96	0.68
	Female			3.84	0.64

4.5.2.4. Evaluation of the free text field

Mayring (2000, as cited in Schmidt, 2007, p. 286) proposes qualitative content analysis for the evaluation of free text fields within questionnaires if they are supposed to raise new content. The evaluation steps were closely based on the process described in the chapter *Qualitative content analysis*. The only difference was the deductive category formation.[119] No new category or subcategory had to be created during this procedure. Table 64 presents the results. The documents of this reduction process can be found in Appendix L.

Table 64

Evaluation of the questionnaire free text fields (source: author's representation)

Sub Category	Codes
Professional development (CN 111)	1
Definitions of project roles (CN 211)	1
Goal-oriented approach (CN 411)	1
Harmony (CN 511)	1
Fairness (CN 516)	1
Balance (LR 122)	1
Respectful interaction (LR 561)	1
Technical understanding (LR 331)	2
Role model (LS 141)	1

4.6. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS.

The interpretation of the results will start with the exact binomial tests before considering the evaluation of differences between the subgroups. When interpreting statistically significant results, Döring and Bortz (2016) recommend always considering the respective effect sizes. Compared to the statistical significance of a result, the effect size according to Reichl (2005), offers a largely

[119] According to Kergel (2018), if categories already exist, this procedure is called deductive category formation. Therefore, if possible, paraphrases and generalizations are created and assigned directly to categories that already exist.

independent assessment of its relevance. A proposal for the interpretation of Cohen's *d* can be found in Lohmann (2019).

- If Cohen's *d* is >0.2, it describes a small effect
- If Cohen's *d* is >0.5, it describes a medium effect
- If Cohen's *d* is >0.8, it describes a large effect

However, this clustering can be considered as a rough guide, as according to Kuhl and Sinner (2015), effect size limits are more or less arbitrarily set and an absolutely valid evaluation of effect sizes does not exist.

4.6.1. Group level

The evaluation of the exact binomial test showed that all factors except experience are important to selling center participants in order to accept leadership. A discussion of possible reasons explaining their relevance was already carried out after the qualitative part of this study. However, by interpreting Cohen's *d*, it is possible to categorize these factors into three different groups with regard to their relevance.

- The factors with a high relevance for acceptance of leadership within selling centers are *performance incentives* (CN 1), *transparency* (CN 21), *resources* (CN 3), *goal orientation* (CN 41), *collegiality and affiliation* (CN 51), *participatory leadership style* (LS 13), *intelligence* (LR 2), *social-communicative competence* (LR 32) and *collegiality and partnership* (LR 56).
- The factors with medium relevance for acceptance of leadership within selling centers are *extraversion* (LR 11) and *accurate and clear work instructions* (IN 1).

When considering the entire sample, statistical significance for experience (LR 4) could not be proven. However, this result does not apply to the respective subgroups. The next chapter will go into this in more detail. A possible explanatory approach was already discussed after the qualitative survey. Based on this explanatory approach, experience in the project management context is defined as competences. In the questionnaire, however, experience was operationalized according to its true meaning into life experience, work experience and everyday experience.

4.6.2. Subgroup differences

The hypotheses $H_{9.2}$ and $H_{35.2}$ could not be verified during this study. When considering the database that builds the foundation of these hypotheses, the following explanatory approach can be found: according to Fuchs-Heinritz (1993, as cited in Heinze, 2001, p.29), statements based on frequency distributions in qualitative studies are considered highly uncertain due to the small sample size. However, the observations of the frequency analysis led to the exploration of subgroup differences for other factors. This exploration provided insights into statistically significant subgroup differences. Therefore, the hypotheses nevertheless brought added value to this study. Liszt (2018) mentions this phenomenon as an advantage of qualitative studies. These subgroup differences contribute to answering research question 2: the relevance of certain factors for the acceptance of leadership within selling centers is dependent on the gender or hierarchical level of selling center participants. These are: *performance incentives* (CN 1), *goal orientation* (CN 3), *resources* (CN 41), *collegiality and affiliation* (CN 53), *extraversion* (LR 11) and *experience* (LR 4).

Before these factors are discussed in detail, it is noticeable that from the perspective of the current state of research, the subgroup differences between extraversion (LR 11) and experience (LR 4) are surprising. Based on the theoretical framework of this work, these two factors relate to characteristics of a prototypical leader and thus refer to the ILT. Although differences between genders in ILT are recognized,[120] differences between hierarchical levels are negated (Epitropaki & Robin, 2004).[121] However, it must be taken into account that the study by Epitropaki and Martin (2004) was conducted without considering a concrete context of reference like selling center participation. This can mean that the respective leadership context not only plays a role for the acceptance of leadership, but also influences ideas about prototypical leaders and whether these ideas are homogeneous or heterogeneous across a group.

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[120] For example, in Jonsen and Maznevski (2010) or Epitropaki and Robin (2004).

[121] Epitropaki and Robin (2004) investigated in an empirical longitudinal study with $N = 439$ undergraduates if prototypes of leadership remain stable over time. They came to the conclusion that ideas for prototypical leaders remain generally stable and are also generally valid for different ages, tenures and hierarchy levels.

The first factor is *performance incentives* (CN 1). Performance incentives are more important for selling center participants on a high hierarchy level than for selling center participants on a low hierarchy level. However, the interpretation of the effect *size* shows that this difference is of little relevance. This result could be related to the respective type of motivation dependent on the hierarchy level. According to Winter (1996), performance incentives have more importance for extrinsically motivated people than for intrinsically motivated people. According to Folkerts-Mähl (2001) and Mansfeld (2011), intrinsic motivation is clearly overrepresented for technology promoters, while intrinsic and extrinsic motives are more in balance for power promoters. According to Georg (2005), this can be explained by the fact that technology promoters are more motivated by technical challenges and the improvement of their own expert status, while both topics are less relevant for power promoters.

Performance incentives (CN 1) are not only of different degrees of importance for selling center participants of different hierarchy levels, but also for selling center participants of different genders. Performance incentives are more important for male selling center participants than for female selling center participants. However, the interpretation of the effect size shows that this difference is also of little relevance. There are references in the literature that coincide with this finding. According to Meulemann (1998), performance incentives are more likely to be important for men than for women. This could also be related to the respective type of motivation to participate within a selling center. According to Weinbach (2004), women are comparatively more often intrinsically motivated, while men are comparatively more often extrinsically motivated.

The second factor is *resources* (CN 3). The availability of project resources is more important to female selling center participants than to male selling center participants. The effect *size* indicates a small relevance of this difference. One possible explanation for this result is an existing and conscious lack of resources, which, according to Altmann (2009), is accompanied by a corresponding drive to dissolve it. Despite various initiatives, such as women's quotas or diversity management, many companies have an unequal distribution of resources between men and women. According to Struthmann (2013), this manifests itself in the fact that women in a company often have more difficult access to financial resources, internal training and challenging tasks than men. According to Busch, Roscher,

Ducki and Kalytta (2009), this applies in particular to women with lower professional qualifications. According to Henderson and Stackman (2010, as cited in Barke, 2015, p. 16), the proportion of women in project management functions is only 30%. Furthermore, according to Henderson and Stackman (2010, as cited in Barke, 2015, p. 16), women are usually involved in smaller projects in which budgets are often marginalized.

The third factor is *goal orientation* (CN 41). This factor is more important for male selling center participants than for female selling center participants. The effect *size* indicates a low relevance for this difference. There are a few references in the literature that coincide with this result. According to Stroot (2004) and Aichhorn (2004), men are more associated with goal orientation, while women are more associated with relationship orientation and team orientation. Moreover, men have a stronger need for power and influence, according to Booth (1972, as cited in Forsyth, 2010, p. 91), which is why they tend to join more competitive and goal-oriented groups, as these in turn can positively influence their own status.

The fourth factor is *collegiality and affiliation* (CN 51). This factor was more important to female selling center participants than to male selling center participants. The effect *size* indicates small relevance for this difference. There are references in the literature that coincide with this finding. According to Boeck (2004), having a sense of belonging to organization and collegiality is more important to women than to men. Especially in stressful situations, as they can occur within a project, according to Fischer and Hüther (2008), women tend to develop a need for affiliation, while men tend to develop needs for esteem and respect from their own supervisor. A Swedish long-term study about stress and health also provides empirical evidence to support this theory. Theorell (2007, as cited in Fischer & Hüther, 2008, p. 31) found that women avoid stress-related consequences such as burnout through social support in the team. According to Theorell (2007, as cited in Fischer & Hüther, 2008, p. 31), men instead protect themselves from the negative effects of stress through a sense of control and perceived room for maneuvering.

The fifth factor is *extraversion* (LR 11). For this factor, a statistically significant difference was found between high-level participants and low-level participants. However, this difference could not reach the limit for a small effect size. In this case,

according to König and Rothland (2018), statistically determined differences are negligible in practice.

The sixth factor is *experience* (LR 4). Experience is more important to selling center participants at a low hierarchy level than to selling center participants at a high hierarchy level. It is also striking that survey participants at a low hierarchy level generated a mean > 3, while survey participants at a high hierarchy level generated a mean < 3. From this result it can be interpreted that selling center participants at high hierarchy levels agree with the importance of experience, while selling center participants at low hierarchy levels disagree with the importance of experience. The effect *size* indicates medium relevance for this difference. Based on previous scientific knowledge, this result can be explained indirectly. According to Keim (1997), experience is a mandatory prerequisite for the role of a technology promoter, since the potential and limitations of products and services must be assessed. According to Fischer (2007), inexperienced leaders particularly need to learn how to correctly integrate and position themselves with their personality within a circle of experienced practitioners, while experienced leaders have easier access. On the other hand, according to Wieandt-Ledebur (2014), employees on a higher hierarchy level, which in selling centers usually have the role of power promoters, tend to give inexperienced leaders a so-called *puppy license*.[122]

Experience (LR 4) not only has different importance for selling center participants of different hierarchy levels, but also for selling center participants of different genders. As above, it is striking that female survey participants generated a mean > 3, while male survey participants generated a mean < 3. Therefore it can be interpreted that experience is rather important to female selling center participants, while it is rather unimportant for male selling center participants. The effect *size* indicates a medium relevance for this difference. An explanation for this result provides the power-influence approach of leadership theories. According to Stenger Vogt (2013), the power-influence approach focuses on the power of the leader, resulting in factors like sanction power, role model function or official authority. According to Leske (2011) and Macha (2000, as cited in Tewes, 2009, p.

[122] Wieandt-Ledebur (2014) argues this puppy license by the fact that inexperienced leaders are perceived less as serious competition within the organization.

36), women tend to see power as more of a responsibility for their own team, while men are more likely to interpret power as ruling over their own team. Assuming responsibility for a team, which corresponds to the more feminine definition of power, presupposes, according to Breyer-Mayländer (2015), higher demands on the degree of maturity and experience of a manager. According to Schueller and Strasmann (2002), inexperienced leaders, for example, try to reduce the distance to their employees in positive times, but often avoid difficult conversations with their employees in difficult times.

5. CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Possible limitations of this research work will be discussed in the following. In particular, the methodology used will be critically assessed.

A qualitative research approach was used to identify the relevant factors that generate acceptance of leadership within selling centers. According to Berger (2010) and Kraya (2006, as cited in Sommerrock, 2009, p. 162), qualitative research methods are associated with a higher risk of subjectivity than quantitative research methods. A misinterpretation of data can never be completely ruled out in qualitative research. Therefore, a focus was placed on comprehensible documentation and a rule-based procedure by using qualitative content analysis. According to Bortz and Döring (2006), qualitative content analysis has the advantage that it is methodologically comprehensible and produces intersubjectively verifiable results. As a further measure to reduce risks of subjectivity, various methods for checking the scientific quality were used.

The selection of main categories for the questionnaire must also be addressed in this chapter. Not all main categories could be checked due to quantity and dropout rate being risked. A selection of main categories was therefore made that also considered the frequency of codes. However, as noted in the quantitative part of the study, these frequencies could not predict the distribution across the sample. However, the differences found in the qualitative survey led to exploratory knowledge being gained regarding subgroup differences. This phenomenon characterizes an important aspect of qualitative research: according to Caspers (2019), observations of frequencies from a qualitative study can only open the field for the researcher, but are not representative of a population. From a rule-based perspective, this statement could be classified as pragmatic. However, according to Völcker, Meyer and Jörke (2019), this pragmatic procedure to exploit the complexity of social realities with regard to specific phenomena is an essential feature of mixed method design studies.

The examination of the if-then hypotheses must also be critically assessed. While dependent and independent variables were defined separately for checking subgroup differences, dependent and independent variables for checking the if-then hypotheses are simultaneously included in the same measurement models.

Basically, there are comparable approaches in the literature for just evaluating rating scales by applying the exact binomial test, for example in Otte (2014). However, there is certainly potential for future research by generating a research model consisting of dependent and independent variables. In this study, the respective constructs to which the if-then hypotheses relate were taken into account for the exploration of potential subgroup differences, while at the same time, the questionnaire length should be minimized.

Due to a lack of prerequisites for parametric tests, almost non-parametric tests were applied to prove differences between sub-samples. According to Janssen and Laatz (2013), these have lower test strength than parametric tests and thus have a lower probability of rejecting an incorrect H_0 hypothesis. A lack of normal distribution was mainly identified as the missing prerequisite for parametric tests. Since the size of a sample, according to Schira (2009), is positively associated with a normal distribution, future replications of these studies could improve the chance to apply parametric tests by investigating a larger sample size.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this work was to identify factors that generate an acceptance of leadership within selling centers. It was furthermore to assess whether these factors can be influenced and whether these factors have different relevance for different selling center participants with different characteristics. The results of this work allowed all three research questions to be answered. Various implications can be derived for both practice and research.

In practice, organizations can use the insights of this work to understand how acceptance of leadership in selling centers arises and under what circumstances different groups of employees voluntarily participate in a selling center. The division into category clusters, main categories and subcategories can be used as a checklist to identify the development potential of selling centers and sales associates with responsibility for selling centers. The scope of these results shows that different areas within an organization can benefit from these findings, for example HR, sales management, upper management, organizational development and operative sales.

HR departments and line managers can use the knowledge gained, for example regarding the Big Five personality profile, to implement concrete measures in order to select suitable candidates for roles as sales associates with selling center responsibility.

Especially for upper management and the organizational development of companies, there are factors that make it clear that certain organizational framework conditions must exist. For example, performance incentives can only be granted if a budget is available. Therefore, organizations need to cultivate a perception of selling centers as project teams, which requires cross-departmental access to resources. This might also require that sales staff proactively address this message to senior management in order to be perceived as a linchpin between buying centers and their companies (Puri, 1992).

For sales associates, knowledge about group differences within a selling center can be helpful. As mentioned in the introduction of this work, it is no longer sufficient for a sales associates to consider the needs of their customers. They also need to be able to recognize, classify and satisfy the needs of selling center

participants who are involved in the respective sales project. However, from a scientific perspective, this study was only able to investigate a sub-area of a more complex topic. Based on this study, the following research steps are examples of further sub-areas:

- Only a subset of factors could be examined in the quantitative part of this study. Based on the review of the frequency analysis, it is possible that particularly relevant factors have not yet been examined for subgroup differences. Thus, further research could focus on an investigation of the other factors.
- This study only examined factors in German-speaking countries. Possible cultural differences, for example, regarding prototypes of leadership to which the implicit leadership theory refers,[123] could also offer potential for further research. Multinational companies with decentralized sales departments in particular would benefit from these findings.
- Further research potential could also exist for the areas of human resources and organizational science. These scientific areas could conceptualize specific skills training based on the identified factors or examine dependencies on other departments when considering factors that relate to organizational structures.
- As discussed in Jones, Brown, Zoltners and Weitz (2005) or Brown, Evans, Mantrala and Challagalla (2005), factors like increasing demands of transparency or goal-oriented leadership generates the risk of a role overload for project managers. Thus, the conceptualization of coping strategies for a project manager role for selling centers opens another potential field for future research.

These examples indicate that this work is only the cornerstone of a research field that has not yet been investigated sufficiently.

[123] See also Lang and Rybnikova (2014) or Oezbek-Potthof (2013) regarding cultural differences for prototypical leadership.

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